

Testimony of Peter Lasagna on behalf of Safe Voices, serving Androscoggin, Franklin and Oxford Counties. In Support of LD 875, An Act to Fund Essential Services for Victims of Domestic Violence. March 19, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, Representative Gattine, distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Peter Lasagna. I live in Auburn and have worked on the board of Safe Voices for twelve years. I currently serve as the chair of the board. In this time I have learned to better grasp both the scope of the Domestic Violence crisis in our communities and the urgent, daily needs for life saving services provided by Safe Voices and all Domestic Violence Resource Centers (DVRC) throughout Maine. I count the staff and leaders of Safe Voices as the most capable, caring, resourceful professionals I've ever known. They move a survivor from first call for help to desperately needed shelter. DVRCs provide court advocacy and collaboration with all levels of law enforcement throughout the traumatizing legal processes. DVRC staffs, counselors help create action plans and truly liberating new, safe, productive lives for survivors and their children. In twelve years I've only seen the need for these vital services for survivors escalate.

Recent years have only amplified this increased need. Greater need during diminished funding means survivors suffer without allies or options. With crucial Department of Justice Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) Federal funding in serious jeopardy, LD 875 becomes an imperative priority. Half of all annual murders in Maine are related to Domestic Violence. The gap must be filled and the Maine Legislature must meet the day. We like to brag that "Mainers help Mainers." Show survivors and Maine's heroic DVRC staff and leaders that you live it.

I coached college age male lacrosse players for forty years. I initially pursued a Safe Voices board opportunity because I believe men, who perpetrate most of our Domestic Violence, need to step up to end it. Young men need to learn non-violent conflict resolution and understand the causal through line between stalking, psychological abuse and domestic violence. I connected my Bates College students to Safe Voices so that they could learn from survivors, educators, leaders how to be better men, partners, fathers, husbands. I believe that lessons learned from Safe Voices will impact their humanity, their willingness to stand up when it's difficult, their civic engagement, more than even their most memorable class or game.

This bill comes before you at a critical time in the lives of current and future survivors. Your task is not to invent services or devoted staff that don't currently exist. They are right here. They will do everything in their power to continue to save lives in Maine. I only ask you to give them a chance. Prioritize the funding LD 875 provides for survivors.