

Testimony in Support of LD 875

Good morning Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. I am testifying in support of LD 875, An Act to Fund Essential Services for Victims of Domestic Violence.

I am Shannon White, I live in Mechanic Falls, and I was a victim of domestic violence. The violence I endured from this man has changed my life forever, I now live with PTSD that I never should have had to endure. Every time I see a news article about a victim being killed, I relive the abuse and realize just how lucky I am to be alive and be able to continue watching my children grow up. Reading these articles also makes me realize just how much we need the support of Safe Voices, until you have been in a situation where you are abused you have no idea how hard it is to leave, how many obstacles there are to leave and how scary it is to go through the legal system and have to face your abuser. I wish I had left the first time, I didn't. I believed him and took him back numerous times and hoped he would change, but each time, the abuse was worse and worse.

It started with a fist raised and a name called, and it escalated to being locked in hotel rooms and my clothes ripped to being choked, to being punched and held down to the horrific night he took a knife to my throat while threatening to leave my house a blood bath for my children to find. I remember coming inside from bringing the dog out, and he pushed me against the wall and started shaking me. He was so angry that I could see it in his eyes. I checked on my daughter, turned the video on my phone on and put it in my pocket and shut her door and went back out to the kitchen to try to calm him down, I was able to audio record the 11 minutes of abuse. I am not sure I will ever not hear that man's words of what he would do to me that night, the anger and hatred in his voice, and to this day, I have no idea what I did to make him so angry. I know I am thankful he did not kill me that night; he was a coward and used the knife to threaten me and get me to do what he wanted. However, he did punch me, he choked me, he grabbed my arms, he pushed me, and he called me names, and when I finally stopped responding and just sat there he calmed down and told me how sorry he was and how much he loved me and he would never hurt me again. Yes, I should have called the police that night. I was afraid as my daughter was home and I did not want her father to know I was in an abusive relationship and it to affect my custody time. Once I had my daughter at school I made him leave, I did not ask anyone for help, and unfortunately, I fell for his sweet talking weeks later and took him back. The same night I took him back was the final night he abused me, he threatened to kill me again, and he threw me to the ground. The difference is that I called the police and was strong enough to ask for help this time. Auburn PD was amazing, and went to the DA and the judges and tried to get a warrant, which was not given to the police despite me having the prior recording. The only reason my abuser was arrested was because he was on Federal Probation, and I reached out to his probation officer and shared the recording with him, and he put out a warrant for his arrest.

We often hear how victims go back to the abuser, many ask why- I will tell you why. The week I waited for the DA to agree on a warrant, I was being love-bombed, calls, texts, how much this man loved me and only me and how he can't live without me and he would change for me. I loved this man, I wanted him to do the work to be better. I thought he just needed the support to change, I thought without the drinking and substances, he could change. I thought with my help he could change. I also feared for my life and not knowing where he was for a week had me

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filled with anxiety, if I just let him come back home I knew I could be quiet and he wouldn't lose his mind and beat me, but not knowing was somehow worse as he could show up whenever he wanted and beat me or kill me. That week my adult kids stayed with me because I was scared to be alone. It was the longest week of my life. Thankfully, his probation officer put him in jail and I helped him by having him go to Biddeford PD to meet me and get arrested. The Androscoggin DA and the judges here never signed off on a warrant for his arrest UNTIL he was finishing his 12 months for breaking probation for abusing me.

The next scary time of my life was when I found out he was being brought back to Maine and he could get out on bail, he was given 2 bail hearings and I attended both and spoke at both of them. I did feel it was important for the judge to hear how my life had been impacted and that this man is dangerous and should not have been out walking the streets. Thankfully, his bail was high and he was not allowed out. I had amazing victim advocates with me who supported me throughout this process.

The next scary date was trial/when he pleaded guilty and I gave a victim statement at this. 8 months for the abuse I endured was a slap on the hand, he did more time for breaking probation. With good behavior, he was out in 6 months. I was told there would be a safety meeting with the local police, the DA, and Safe Voices and his probation officer BEFORE he got out- this is where I will tell you how broken our system is. I received a 6 am phone call from the Androscoggin jail telling me he was being released in just a few minutes, they called 3 times to wake me up. Where was my Safety meeting? Did I feel safe? Was I prepared? Nothing about that day felt good, I was scared, I cried and I reached out to the victim advocate as well as to Safe Voices as I didn't know what to do. Would he come find me is all that ran through my head? I did not spend that day at home as I was too scared to be home alone. Safe Voices and the Victim Advocate had no idea he was being released as no one told them. Amazing how well the system works for the victims. When I say we need funding and we need change, this is one of the many reasons. Can you imagine getting a phone call or 3 at 6 am and finding out the man who tried to kill you or threatened to kill is being let go from jail, no safety plan, no idea he was getting out this quick, no preparation. What if there was no Safe Voices for me to call that day? Who would I have called, who would have organized the safety meeting I did finally get? Who would have helped calm the anxiety I felt that day? I am not alone in these feelings. The amount of domestic violence that is rising, the amount of victims that are walking around scared and living with fear is rising. We need funding for more services as this fear creeps up when we least expect it.

Thank you for listening today. Please understand I am not alone in saying the funds for Safe Voices to continue to support victims is crucial; the abuse is rising and unfortunately, as the economy and mental health decline the victims will increase and us victims deserve to have the support from the amazing staff at Safe Voices.