

Testimony of Samantha Chasse

In support of LD 875, An Act to Fund Essential Services for Victims of Domestic Violence.
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
March 19, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Samantha Chasse, I am from Aroostook County, and I am writing to share why support for this critical funding is so important.

1 out of 3 teenagers experience teen dating violence. 8% of Maine high schoolers are harmed by their partners. According to Maine statistics, there are 130,000 high schoolers enrolled in Maine, which means 11,180 students deal with this form of abuse. It is a state mandate in Maine for all high schools to provide their students with education on the topic of teen dating violence, however, most teens decide that it is an unimportant and irrelevant topic.

Teens in my area choose not to take this seriously, however, there are students also in my area who have experienced teen dating violence. I have heard stories from kids at school of a boyfriend putting a knife up to their pregnant partner's stomach, manipulating their partners into having sex, and physical abuse resulting in hospitalization. I feel that educating students on this topic is not taken seriously enough. Teenagers who experience this abuse feel as though no one is there for them because their peers do not take it seriously. They fear telling their parents for many reasons, such as their parents might force them to break up, or their partner threatened to kill themselves or their parents. Often teens shy away from opening up to others about their abuser. But, when they do open up to their friends, their friends lack a deeper understanding of how to handle it. This is due to an absence of education on the subject.

The state of Maine, even though it is one of the 37 states that provide education about teen dating violence, does not provide its teachers and students with enough education; therefore, teachers are not talking about the importance of the topic. Providing more funding to domestic violence resource centers that provide this vital information would ensure proper education on the topic. Right now Hope and Justice Project has a single school-based educator. They go to all the schools in Aroostook to provide education to teens on teen dating violence. With more educators, more can be taught, and more can be taken seriously. Students can learn that teen dating violence should be discussed and as they learn, the topic will hopefully become less uncomfortable. They will learn that yes, it does happen to students and their peers even in our small community. They can learn about different types of abuse, they can learn that jealousy is not normal in a relationship, and they can learn that there are services out there to help them when they feel as though they are alone. With more funding, these services can help more students not feel alone. Having more school-based educators would provide education on the subject and would not only inform students and staff but also provide safety planning for students who report instances of abuse to teachers and other authority figures.

A lack of funding causes 11,180 teens in Maine to have to face this kind of abuse, these victims are our friends, daughters, sons, and the teens in our community. So please, fund LD 875 in support of Essential Services for Victims of Domestic Violence.