



**Testimony of Kelly Brown on behalf of Next Step Domestic Violence Project
In Support of LD XXX, An Act to Fund Essential Services for Victims of Domestic
Violence
March 2025**

Senator Ingwersen, Representatives Meyers, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Kelly Brown, and I write on behalf of Next Step Domestic Violence Project, serving Hancock and Washington Counties. I urge your support for this critical funding to sustain essential services for survivors of domestic violence.

This past Christmas Eve, we helped a mother safely retrieve her child's Christmas gifts from her abusive partner, who was using the holiday to exert power and control. With our support, she obtained a Protection from Abuse Order on Christmas Eve, our law enforcement Liaison was able to get it served before the holiday, and her little boy had Santa arrive right on time Christmas morning. After the holiday we continued support to secure safe housing, and services to rebuild her life. I am proud to be part of an organization who was able to make this happen but more so, because of my employment at Next Step, I understand that these services are necessary all times of the year and all hours of the day. This is why we have a 24-hour helpline with trained advocates working with multiple systems including law enforcement, Child Protective Services, healthcare systems, and probation.

Maintaining these services is becoming unsustainable due to flat funding and rising costs. We have already made painful reductions:

- Scaling back in-person advocacy in rural areas due to staffing shortages and travel costs.
- Adjusting our 24-hour helpline to prioritize immediate crisis calls over the weekend and evenings.
- Reducing civil legal representation from two full-time attorneys to one part-time attorney, with uncertainty beyond October 1.
- Losing our designated Child Protective Services liaison as of October 1.

Without additional investment for our expertise and advocacy, our partners—including law enforcement, courts, and CPS—will face increased burdens. More survivors and their children will struggle to access legal protections, emergency shelter, and long-term stability. Our community will continue to have this need for all our crisis services, and we know that when our services are not available, people feel they are forced to stay in the scary situation or leave but feel compelled to return, unable to find a way to live on their own, giving more power to the abusive partner with every attempt that they are unsuccessful.

Investing in domestic violence services is both morally and fiscally responsible. By funding these programs, Maine not only safeguards survivors but also reduces long-term financial strain on state systems. I urge you to ensure the biennial budget reflects the urgent need for these life-saving resources. Thank you for your time and consideration.