

Testimony of Julie Hausman  
In Support of LD 875, An Act to Fund Essential Services for Victims of Domestic Violence  
Wednesday, March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Julie Hausman, I live in Turner Maine, and I am writing alongside Safe Voices Support Group, to urge you to invest in the critical lifesaving services of Maine's network of Domestic Violence Resource Centers.

For 18 years, I have facilitated a weekly drop-in support group for survivors of domestic violence in Androscoggin County. It is their collective voice that I bring to you today.

Domestic violence support groups provide a safe and confidential space for survivors to share their experiences, gain emotional support, and access resources to rebuild their lives. Support groups can foster a sense of community, reminding survivors that they are not alone and that freedom from abuse is possible.

Lack of funding poses a significant challenge to maintaining vital services like support groups, often leading to reduced availability, limited resources, and even program closures. Without an investment in critical DV services, organizations like Safe Voices will struggle to sustain our support groups. Facing the reality of closing our groups, I went to the women who attend group, and I asked them what they wanted to share with you. Here is what they wanted you to know:

For many survivors of abuse, speaking out can be dangerous, putting their safety, well-being, and even their lives at risk. Fear of retaliation, financial dependence, lack of support, or cultural and societal pressures can make it nearly impossible to share their experiences openly—especially in public forums like this. However, just because we, the members of the Safe Voices support group, cannot come and stand in front of you today, does not mean our voice is any less important. Our experiences, pain, and resilience matter, whether spoken aloud or carried quietly within the confines of our group.

Support groups have a transformative power that extends beyond mere emotional support—they foster healing, resilience, and personal growth. Our group provides a safe and understanding space, allowing individuals to share their struggles, break the silence of isolation, and gain strength from others who have walked similar paths. The collective wisdom and encouragement within a support group can empower us to reframe our experiences, build self-confidence, and develop coping strategies that lead to meaningful empowerment. Through shared stories, mutual validation, and guidance, we as participants often discover newfound hope, a sense of belonging, and the motivation to move forward. The journey of healing is rarely linear, but our support group helped to create a foundation for lasting transformation and reminded us that we are not alone, and that liberation is not only possible but attainable.

- One survivor who lives in Rumford shared: “I tried to leave my abuser several times but without a stable support system I was unsuccessful. Safe Voices support group gave me the strength and support I needed. These ladies quite literally saved my life.”
- Another young mother living in Lisbon wanted you to know:  
The Safe Voices support group has been extremely helpful because I can’t talk about my experiences with non-survivors (i.e. my family and friends) and have them understand or provide feedback that can help me move forward. Outside of a safe support group, to the average person, we sound crazy, pathetic, weak, and relying solely on friends and family for support would perpetuate stereotypes and often lead us right back to the abuser. The professional knowledge and education provided in the support group is immensely helpful and can’t be matched by friends and family. It’s impossible to understand how dv affects you unless you have lived through it. The community and families are also inappropriate places to seek support because often those are the domains of the abuser where they exert power and influence. A vast majority of victims can’t afford private counseling, and one on one counseling is not the same as hearing from other survivors, discussing things as a group with a professional leader. Survivors give each other hope because they are real examples of life on the other side and all that entail.”
- Another survivor asked me to share with you:

“I live in an undisclosed location in Maine as protection from my abuser. I am writing on behalf of Safe Voices Support Group, to urge you to invest in the critical lifesaving services of Maine’s network of Domestic Violence Resource Centers, like Safe Voices throughout the state.

Safe Voices saved my life!

I was in an abusive relationship and working as a school administrator in a large district. Despite my plight for help, I believed the only way out was suicide.

Safe Voices reached out while in the hospital & helped me find the resources I needed to start over and rebuild as I divorced my abuser.

Safe Voices was there when he broke into my home and violently raped me, in hopes to get me pregnant, so I would “have to stay” before the divorce became final.

Sitting around the “table” (virtual or in person) with women from all walks of life who have lived and experienced domestic violence and abuse has been the most powerful and productive, healing experience of my life. Julie has been an unwavering leader, showing up each week with her bright smile, kind words, providing education and support. The education for me, who felt I had failed my abusive partner, helped me understand that he prayed on my empathy and kindness, helping me relax the pile of shame I had been burying myself under.

Today I feel humbled to have had the pleasure and benefit of an opportunity to speak freely about unspeakable things, side by side with other survivors.”

Over the 18 years I have been facilitating support group, it has been my honor to witness the immense bravery of survivors seeking help, reclaiming their lives, and breaking the cycle of violence. Their strength in facing trauma and working toward healing is nothing short of inspiring. However, their journey should not be one they must walk alone. Providing critical funding for domestic violence services, including support groups, is essential in ensuring that survivors have the resources they need to rebuild their lives safely and with dignity. No one should be turned away due to a lack of funding or resources. As a society, we must commit to supporting and uplifting survivors, providing sustainable funding, and ensuring that lifesaving services remain accessible to all who need them.

Thank you,

Julie Hausman, advocate, and the amazing voices of Safe Voices support group.