

Testimony of Jolene Brendelle Miles  
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 Jolene Miles and I live in Androscoggin County. I am a survivor. I want to share why support for this critical funding is so important.

For almost 11 years my younger three children were raised in a highly abusive toxic relationship. My current husband, whom I'm currently involved in an extremely turmoiled dragged out divorce process, is a serial felon and a repeat domestic abuse offender in Maine. He is a danger to his family, his children, society, law enforcement and even himself. He has been convicted of many charges ranging from drug trafficking, domestic violence, and an aggravated rape. Through recorded conversations and Androscoggin Counties Detectives retrieval of recordings, Michael made it very clear that IF he was going back to Prison, "he would do his time", BUT when he gets out stated verbatim "you will have to watch your back for the rest of your life", "I will kill you and the children, starting with your oldest", "I will be in an incognito car, you won't even see me coming". Michael has previously been convicted of Domestic Violence upon me including strangulation, in which he only served 14 month prison sentence. The statistics of strangulation will tell you, nationwide and in Maine, that my chances of domestic homicide increased 750% with an interpersonal strangulation. Yes, no typo, 750% increase that Michael will kill me (or possibly kill somebody else).

I reached out to Safe Voices approximately 9 years ago. An advocate with Safe Voices became my true "ride or die" through this extremely difficult toxic marriage. There is no straight easy way to navigate or leave an abusive relationship. Every single situation is unique. For years I wanted to support my husband through his extreme treatment towards the children and I, feeling he just needed "help". It was a long difficult road that finally led me to say enough is enough. Through PFAs, criminal court hearings, and even to my current divorce process, Safe Voices has supported the children and I through it all. The children and I received assistance through Safe Voices in and out of the court processes. Safe Voices helped us attain a security system, helped us through holidays, including Christmas gifts for my children. Safe Voices has held my hand through some pretty tough times, pointing me in the direction of other Domestic Abuse supports as well. Safe Voices educated me through these years as well regarding domestic violence, abuse and the risks, the rates and also my children's wellbeing. Safe Voices advocate attended every single one of my court proceedings through PFAs, hearings, criminal courts and now my divorce. I have shared my story on podcasts, with local agencies, news articles and news reports. To make this part extremely clear, I could write a book now to answer the overused question on "why don't we just leave". I could also write a book on how "leaving" an abusive relationship is the hardest most dangerous thing I have ever done. A fear that will

clearly continue once my violent offender is released in a few months. A part of my life that will become a lifelong journey of keeping myself and my children safe from a very dangerous man.

Through this process of leaving, my children and I have lost everything. I have lost my career as a firefighter paramedic of 17 years. I have lost my ability to continue breeding Golden Retrievers, our only income. We lost our vehicle. We lost friends and family. We now stand to lose our home. It has been a never-ending story of loss. I can't imagine at times how much this has impacted my children.

Here's what I do know. Safe Voices currently does not have enough resources to help those of us experiencing violence. There is no availability of legal assistance, there is limited number of advocates per domestic abuse person. There are NO resources for children who not only live in domestic violent situations, but then have a family member incarcerated due to violent offenses. I have been privy, unfortunately, to witness the amount of support I had years ago in comparison to the support I have now. Safe Voices is maxed out. The one on one I felt I had for support through all the avenues that Safe Voices offered, I truly feel I do not have that anymore. My advocate tries...and other advocates have tried. But you can sense that they just don't have the time or staff. Fortunately my abusive husband is currently incarcerated. I am beyond fearful of what mine and my children lives are going to look like in the upcoming months for my husband's release from prison. The children and I are at an all time extreme risk. We need help more so now than we did while living through the abuse. We need an extensive safety plan, we need one on one with an advocate. We need support through this process. If we don't have that support, no PFA paper, bail conditions or probation keeps these offenders from reoffending. That is a fact! This is an extremely scary position to be in, yet to imagine that our resources for help are so limited that we need to navigate this process alone. The hotlines, the advocacy is all super, but these types of situations don't get better or easier after you get out. What if I have to relocate my children? What if I have to flee with my children and pets (again) in the middle of the night? What if me having to do this horrible divorce on my own with no legal help or lawyer, has left me and my children as Victims to the Family Court systems that says I have to share and coparent with this dangerous man? I am afraid to do this without any resources, as I've had to do so much of this without resources as it is. It's depleting me. It's scaring me. This is why women stay.