

STATE OF MAINE

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MAINE PROSECUTORS ASSOCIATION
SHIRA BURNS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

“An Act to Fund Essential Services for Victims of Domestic Violence”
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Testimony in Support of LD 875

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. My name is Shira Burns and I represent the Maine Prosecutors Association. I am here to testify in support of LD 875.

I was a domestic violence and sexual assault prosecutor in York County for almost 10 years before I was appointed Executive Director of the Maine Prosecutors Association. Prosecution of domestic violence and sexual assault crimes is a priority for every single one of our elected district attorneys in Maine.

Community based domestic violence advocates are vital in supporting the ability of a victim to participate in the criminal legal process. One of the services that domestic violence resource center directors are going to have to consider cutting back on if funding remains flat is staff that is focused on working with criminal justice partners. The sustainability of the work domestic violence advocates provide is an integral part of the sustainability of prosecution and the criminal legal system. Successful prosecution of domestic violence crimes is highly correlated with the victim being supported by a domestic violence resource center who works closely with the local district attorney's office.

Collaboration between prosecution and domestic violence advocates provide for better offender accountability and victim safety. Let me be clear, prosecutors will not be able to hold domestic violence offenders accountable for their actions without the availability of community based domestic violence advocates.

Our collaboration comes in many forms including working on specific cases that are in the criminal legal system, but also on preventative measures to better account for victim safety. Specifically, we have coordinated community response teams across the state that incorporate criminal justice stakeholders coming together to address concerns in their jurisdiction that have an effect on the criminal legal system. This is commonly led by a domestic violence resource advocate. In connection with those coordinated community response teams, we also have high risk task force meetings when the safety of a victim is of such high concern it is imperative that all stakeholders come together to share information and come up with a plan to move forward. That plan incorporates how to hold the offender accountable for their chosen behavior and how to keep the victim safe. Again, it has been the domestic violence advocate who has led these efforts.

In my personal experience as a domestic violence prosecutor and now as the Executive Director of the Maine Prosecutors Association, I have seen time after time the importance of having an advocate that specializes working with partners in the criminal legal system. The criminal legal system cannot afford to lose this vital partner.

For these reasons, the Maine Prosecutors Association is in support of LD 875.