

Chairs Representative Meyer and Senator Baldacci and honorable members of the Health and Human Services Committee: Thank you for allowing me the time to speak on LD#875 My name is Joanne Mason from Readfield. Member of the Family Violence Project Board of Directors.

Today you may hear deeply moving testimonies about the challenges and hardships some individuals have faced before finding safety from domestic violence with a program like ours. However, my purpose here today is not to discuss that. Instead, I'd like to focus on the operational aspects of running non-profit organizations like ours.

The Family Violence Project operates under the leadership of an Executive Director, with a Board of Directors serving in an advisory role to oversee and manage the budget. Our funding relies heavily on federal, state grants and local fundraising efforts, which allow us to uphold even the basic standard of care for victims.

Some might ask: 'What does the organization do?' or 'Where can costs be reduced to make services more affordable?' I want to assure you that our Board of Directors and Executive Director have thoroughly examined every possibility to streamline expenses. If there are areas where savings could be achieved without compromising the quality of care, those changes would have already been implemented.

We are grateful to our employees because although we pay them the best we can, it isn't nearly what they are worth because we recognize their invaluable expertise and dedication. The reality is that they could find higher-paying positions elsewhere. So, why do they stay? Because they are deeply passionate about the work we do and genuinely believe in our mission to end domestic violence.

We provide a 24/7 emergency hotline, Outreach, Civil Court Advocacy including Protection from Abuse orders, Support groups, School and community based education and of course Supportive housing.

That housing is more than just a roof and a bed. There we help people; families, stay safe and off the street. We help people who sometimes leave with just the clothes on their backs become financially stable and find jobs and safe housing. We also have the ChangeWork program which is a Domestic violence intervention program that is certified by the Department of Corrections. This program is very important toward our mission to end domestic violence.

It is highly likely that someone in this room has experienced, or knows someone who has experienced, the devastating impact of domestic violence. Each victim's journey is different, but they all have one thing in common. If they need help, we will be there. But now, we are turning to you with the question will you assist us in continuing this vital work?

The current uncertainty surrounding federal grants leaves us deeply concerned about our ability to sustain our efforts. Without a stable funding source, the lives of vulnerable Mainers hang in the balance. We are here today to urge you to protect these individuals by designating sufficient resources to help us ensure their safety and well-being. Together, we can make a difference for those who need it most.

Thank you.