



*Working to End Domestic Violence*

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Testimony of Rebecca Austin  
In Support of LD 875, An Act to Fund Essential Services for Victims of Domestic Violence  
Wednesday, March 19th, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyers, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Rebecca Austin, and I live in Franklin County. I am the Executive Director of Safe Voices, the Domestic Violence Resource Center serving Androscoggin, Oxford, and Franklin County, to urge you to invest in the critical lifesaving services of Maine's network of Domestic Violence Resource Centers.

Domestic violence is a pervasive public health and safety crisis. Every year in Maine, thousands of survivors seek assistance from domestic violence resource centers. They call our 24-hour helpline, reach out to us at our office, and are referred to us from the courts, law enforcement, counselors, and hospitals across this state. They show up at our resource centers looking for help, and we are there providing the critical wrap around supports that serve as a lifeline to safety and liberation from abuse.

For 15 years, I have witnessed firsthand the devastating impact of domestic violence and the urgent need for organizations like Safe Voices and the network of Domestic Violence Resource Centers across Maine to be here to answer the call. And for 15 years, I have answered the call and sat with survivors who have come to me feeling lost and scared. I have helped them create a safety plan and helped them find hope. But over the last several years answering that call has become harder and harder.

In the last several years, calls to Safe Voices helpline have increased by 157%, but our funding has remained flat. This is simply unsustainable. The increased demand for services has placed immense strain on an already under-resourced system. We are struggling to keep up with the rising number of survivors seeking support, and we have been operating at full capacity with limited staff and insufficient funding for years. At the same time, we have seen this increase in demand for services, we have had to eliminate positions. In the last few years, we have eliminated two educators, an overnight shelter advocate, and a helpline advocate position just to name a few. This growing gap between need and availability jeopardizes the safety of survivors and hinders their ability to access critical support. Without immediate investment, the system will continue to be overwhelmed, and we will have to make harmful cuts in order to balance our budgets, leaving countless individuals without the help they urgently require.

When I am training new advocates, I always stress the importance of answering the call. Often times, we get one chance to make that connection, one opportunity to safety plan. It's important for us to remember that domestic violence services are responding to a crisis and are a critical form of homicide prevention in Maine. And as the demand for our services continues to increase, and we are unable to meet that need, we will increasingly be unable to answer the call. When survivors are provided with the necessary resources to escape abuse, they are far less likely to become victims of fatal violence. Investing in domestic violence programs is not just about support, it is about saving lives and preventing irreversible tragedies.

The state has a fundamental obligation to protect its residents from harm and ensure that all individuals have access to the support they need to live free from violence. When the state fails to adequately fund these services, it leaves vulnerable individuals without the protection and resources necessary to escape dangerous situations. By prioritizing funding for domestic violence programs, the state affirms its commitment to public safety, and the fundamental human rights and dignity of all survivors, ensuring that every survivor has a pathway to safety and stability. Investing in life-saving services for domestic violence survivors reflects the values of Mainers.

Survivors of domestic violence should not have to choose between safety and homelessness, or face seeking help and being turned away due to a lack of resources. These services are a lifeline, and their availability can mean the difference between life and death for many victims.

I urge you to prioritize funding for domestic violence services in the upcoming budget to ensure that no survivors are left without the resources they need to escape abuse and rebuild their lives. Every dollar invested in these critical programs saves lives, protects families, and strengthens our communities.

Thank you for your time and commitment to keeping critical domestic violence services available in our State.

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