

Testimony of Donna Robichaud
In Support of LD 875, An Act to Fund Essential Services for Victims of Domestic
Violence Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
March 19, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services my name is Donna Robichaud, I am from Aroostook County, and I am writing to share why support for this critical funding is so important.

My story begins like so many others. I met my abuser and everything was a whirlwind. We met, he moved himself in, and about 6 or so months in the abuse started. Over the 6 years with this man, so many things happened. It started out with yelling and name calling. It quickly became grabbing my arms and pushing me into walls. Eventually his hands were no longer on my arms but would be around my neck as he held me against the wall. He would throw my dog over the baby gate into another room. We had one child together and after he was born, my abuser started to target my older son from a previous relationship. He would pick my son up and throw him into his bedroom, which one time resulted in my son's foot going through a window. He threw my son into a snow bank with no clothes on. He would flip furniture that I would be sitting on over on top of me. The children and I started to go into their room and close the door every night as soon as we ate supper and would stay in there until the kids would go to sleep just to avoid upsetting him. I tried to end the relationship many times but it always felt easier to allow him back so at least I knew what to prepare for each day. When I did remove him from my home for the last time, things escalated beyond what I could have ever imagined. Several times a day my abuser would appear where I was. He would sit outside of my job or at the end of my street. The calls to police were daily. Over the next several months of surviving day to day, things increased to a point of finding out that my abuser had been living in my ceiling/attic crawl space for about 6 weeks. The ceiling in my bathroom finally gave out and he fell through my ceiling on top of me while my children were on the other side of the wall in their room. He finally was arrested again but only to be released again. Every single time it felt like the system failed and allowed him back out to abuse me. The last assault was what it took to finally have someone take things seriously. My abuser was inside my home when I had returned. He drug me into the basement and strangled me to the point I lost consciousness. He was carrying my body out of the home when I woke up. He was getting car keys out of his pocket after he brought me outside and I started screaming. After many hours of searching he was arrested for attempted murder, kidnapping, and many other charges. And things didn't end there. I had years still to face between criminal court and family court eventually ending in successfully terminating my abuser's parental rights to my son.

The first time I contacted Hope and Justice Project, was the morning after my abuser was found under my car in my garage hiding from police. The officer that responded to my call that night

gave me their card and information. The next morning, I called HJP and was connected to an advocate that became my saving grace for what ended up being several years. After speaking with someone at HJP, I met with the advocate and filed a Protection from Abuse order which was just the beginning of so much more.

So many things continued to happen. There were 33 calls and many threats made within a 3 week span after the protection order was granted. My abuser had broken into my home several times. Every time my advocate would call law enforcement to express concerns when there was no response to the violations. No response to me. I felt continuously let down but my advocate would step right in and be my strength. The stalking and terrorizing became unbearable. At that point my advocate coordinated with law enforcement for an officer to set up a camera inside my home to catch him, but little did we know that my abuser was inside my home during this and knew the camera was there. I was in daily contact with my advocate at Hope and Justice Project who was in constant contact with police.

Every single court date, my advocate from Hope and Justice Project was with me. She would plan with the Court Marshalls before court as my abuser was such a high risk. He had fled from jail in the past and safety planning had to be done before each date. My advocate was able to communicate these concerns and my abuser was kept in handcuffs and feet shackled the entire time we were in court. Sometimes there were officers stationed at the court doors just in case he tried to run. She sat beside me in a way that would block his view from seeing me. One time the Marshalls were busy and as I left the courtroom my abuser walked face to face to me, even with a transport deputy with him, and he laughed. From then on my advocate would make sure my abuser was already out of the hallway or still in the courtroom being held back before we would get up to leave. She would walk in the courthouse or courtroom before me every single time and scan the area before going any further. She would approach the transport deputies that were with my abuser to make sure it never happened again.

I remember one court date, which my abuser and his attorney had tried to file something to say policy or law wasn't followed or something was overlooked so he should be let out. The moment I heard that, I could not focus on anything else said. It was like the world just stopped and went silent. The Judge had to review the Motion they had filed so my advocate and I sat with the Assistant District Attorney, who was the prosecutor on the case, safety planning what was next. A plan was made for me to leave the area to a confidential location as it wasn't safe for me to be at any shelters in Aroostook County. All of these conversations were happening around me and without my advocate there to help, I don't know what would have happened. In the end, the Judge did not let my abuser out on this technicality so for that moment I was safe again. The weeks leading up to a jury trial, my advocate sat with me during every meeting with the Prosecuting Attorney as we prepped for testimony. She sat with me while I wrote a Victim Impact Statement and also assisted my family members with writing a statement. My advocate

sat with me in the court room during my abuser's sentencing holding my hand while the Victim Witness Advocate read my impact statement. She didn't think twice about holding me as I sobbed in that courtroom hearing my abuser address the court before he was led away to start his prison sentence.

Even though my abuser was in prison, he had written several requests for furloughs from prison. Each time, my advocate from Hope and Justice sat with me to write a letter pleading with the courts to not grant these furloughs. The terrorizing just continued in other ways.

When my abuser was released from prison, my advocate from Hope and Justice Project was there once again for me. She coordinated a High Risk Response Meeting with a couple of local law enforcement agencies, a probation officer that was going to be overseeing my abuser's release, the Victim Witness Advocate, and myself. As a team we made an extensive safety plan around his release. The release plan included my abuser moving to Nevada. My advocate was my voice and we had every moment planned until my abuser "checked in" that he was officially in Nevada with his family member. This plan included that I was not to be alone at any point during a 48-hour span of time, whether that meant going to a confidential shelter or remaining with my father at all times. Some of this time was spent just sitting with my advocate when my father had appointments and I couldn't be alone.

The understanding and support I received from my advocate was amazing. She was my voice so many times when I couldn't speak. When I didn't know where to turn, she was there to talk. She connected me to a support group that was run by Hope and Justice Project. I found many more supports through others who attended the group and had similar experiences. There was also a group for children which my sons attended at the same time so I didn't have to find babysitters for them. Hope and Justice Project also made sure that my children and I had things to open on Christmas morning when I didn't have the financial means to do so. She even was able to find donated furniture when I moved into a new place.

From the initial Protection from Abuse Order, the Parental Rights & Responsibilities, every single criminal court case date, Termination of Parental Rights, and right up through his release from prison, my advocate never left my side. There wasn't one appointment or one court date that she missed I was never alone. My advocate listened and would explain things to me that I was not in a state to comprehend. When I felt like law enforcement or the systems weren't there to help me, she was. The dreadful day when I survived the last assault, I said to my family that I survived for a reason and I will help others. I knew that there were others who needed the same kind of unconditional support that I received. I am here to write this testimonial and to now be helping other survivors because of the amazing advocacy I received at Hope and Justice Project.