

## Testimony in Support of LD 875

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Emily and I am from Cumberland County. Today I am testifying in support of LD 875, An Act to Fund Essential Services for Victims of Domestic Violence.

You've probably heard that one in four women and one in ten men in the United States have reported experiencing sexual violence, physical violence, and/or stalking in their lifetime, according to the Maine Coalition To End Domestic Violence.

Well, the actual rate of domestic violence and sexual assault is unknown. It's unknown because many victims experiencing domestic violence feel they cannot disclose it, report it and ask for help. Oftentimes victims blame themselves; not viewing abuse as abuse. It is common for victims to feel they are living minute to minute, just trying to survive.

This is where funding for services for victims of domestic violence is critical. It's critical because it saves lives. Funding helps victims locate shelters, advocates and attorneys who work with victims to put safety measures in place. Funding for services helps keep victims alive. It is common for victims to struggle with trust. Domestic violence is a pattern of abusive behavior towards an intimate partner in a dating or family relationship. Victims may not feel safe disclosing abuse with close friends or family, especially in rural communities or communities where an abuser is well-known, and the victim feels they cannot safely utilize local law enforcement services.

I can relate.

Funding for victims' services allows a collaborative response with law enforcement, the court system and various health organizations within our Maine communities to promote safety. Funding provides victims with access to websites where victims can find emergency and crisis numbers, shelters across the state and other essential services. These essential funds also cover advocates to work with victims 24 hours a day. Advocates help connect victims to the services they need based on their personal and unique situation which may include leaving an abusive situation in the middle of the night. Advocates also help victims/survivors navigate the court system to ensure proper protection is in place. Funding helps cover the costs of staffing, shelters, legal services and more.

When I first moved Maine, I had an order of protection from another state based on bail conditions which was nearing an expiration date. My abuser, a well-known statewide public official, had appealed all 4 of his convictions. Just before the Supreme Court had upheld his convictions, and just a few months before his jail sentence was about to begin, he took a trip out to my new hometown here in Maine, knowing where I lived. Over a 2 ½ hour ride from his

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home. His decision to hang out near my home where my children and I walk multiple times a week created a lot of fear. My son happened to be near him at the time.

I knew what to do. After contacting my local police department to report the incident, the officer I spoke with provided me with the name of a local resource center, Through These Doors. He mentioned this organization could provide me with information on how to renew my expiring order of protection, in Maine.

After making a call to Through These Doors I was able to connect with an advocate who guided me through the court process in requesting a new order of protection. The advocate was available to explain the court process to me. The advocate was present during the hearing which resulted in hours of testimony, while my abuser appeared remotely from a county jail.

Through great leadership, support and guidance at Through These Doors I was able to obtain a 2-year Order of Protection through the State of Maine.

Domestic Violence can happen to anyone. Funding for victims' services protects victims and helps to save lives.

Thank you for listening.