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**Testimony of Amanda Cost on behalf of Partners for Peace
In Support of LD 875, An Act to Fund Essential Services for Victims of Domestic Violence
March 19, 2025**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyers, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Amanda Cost. I am writing on behalf of Partners for Peace, serving Penobscot and Piscataquis counties, to share why support for this critical funding is so important.

Maine's network of Domestic Violence Resource Centers provides 24/7 critical, wrap-around services for survivors of domestic abuse and their children and essential support, training, and information for community response systems. Last year, Partners for Peace served 1,634 people in Penobscot and Piscataquis Counties.

The state has articulated on many occasions the importance of the services for survivors of domestic violence that our network provides, but has failed to invest an adequate amount of state funds to ensure the sustainability of these services. For the last 5-years, we have been doing our best to meet the need with the resources we have, and we have taken drastic measures to reduce and eliminate programs to keep up with the increase in costs in the face of flat funding. This is not sustainable for the domestic violence resource center network. If we are forced to continue this way, the further reductions it will necessitate will harm the safety net that survivors and our communities have come to rely on.

At Partners for Peace, the share of services supported by the state general funds through the DHHS contract was 18% in FY24, with the total DHHS contract - federal and state funds combined – constituting 47% of our revenue. In the current fiscal year, which is an outlier due to the temporary general funds replacing the loss in federal VOCA dollars, the DHHS contract is 48% of our total revenue, and state general funds comprise 26% of our total agency budget. [for historical perspective: in FY19, the DHHS contract constituted 58% of our total agency revenues, with the state general funds constituting only 10% of our budget overall.]

To keep our contracted core services whole, we spend an exorbitant amount of energy writing foundation grants, seeking additional competitive federal dollars, and fundraising. Again, we

are not seeking these funds to expand our services. We dream of the day when we can feel secure with our funding projections enough to make our dreams a reality. These funds ensure an advocate is available to answer the helpline 24-7, there are staff to manage the legal program, and our shelter has the basics to support survivors who live there. We continue to make hard choices about which programs to staff and which ones to let go of.

- At Partners for Peace, we cannot provide peer support for survivors in the form of education and in-person support groups for survivors of domestic violence.
- In the past 18 months, we have eliminated the following positions: Volunteer Services Coordinator, Groups Coordinator, Prevention Educator, Rural Legal Services Coordinator, and Shelter Program Manager.
- We no longer have the staff to support a 24-hour helpline, 24-hour residential services support, and 24-hour hospital accompaniment.

In Penobscot and Piscataquis Counties, we have seen an increase in the severity and complexity of survivors' experiences with abuse and violence. In February of 2025, there were at least three domestic violence cases that we would consider high-risk or high lethality reported on by all our local new outlets. The details of each of these cases vary, but in each one of them, there was a victim who deserved help, information, and ongoing support. That's what we do; this is who we help, and without an increase in funds, our ability to support survivors in such complex and dangerous situations will likely cease.

Partner for Peace has provided services in our region for over 50 years. We are the state's oldest domestic violence resource center and the third oldest in the country. We have a rich history and a deep understanding of our services' impact on individuals throughout our region. A survivor who worked with one of our advocates shared this sentiment with her:

"I've utilized advocacy for 6 years now. Navigating the aftereffects of abuse had quite a devastating toll on my mental health...I knew leaving the abusive relationship I was in wouldn't be easy... Your familiar face is greatly appreciated...Thank you for taking time to listen to my story as it has evolved over the years, for being there as the calm and kind person you are. You have been a tremendous support!!"-anonymous survivor helped by Partners for Peace.

What will be lost if funding for our resource centers remains flat or decreases? The losses will



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be felt in sectors all over our region.

- We will be limited in our ability to help survivors navigate the courts, Child Protective Services, the healthcare system, etc.
- We will no longer be able to provide presentations to students about dating abuse and violence or where to get help if they have a friend who needs it.
- We will no longer be able to assist employers with workplace-specific safety plans when they fear for an employee because they know their safety is at risk.
- We will not be able to help meet the longer-term needs survivors have to build economic self-sufficiency, which helps people stay free from abuse once they have risked everything to leave.

Now is the time for our great state to step up and demonstrate to survivors that they matter and that lawmakers care about their lives enough to invest in the programs that support them. Each year, statewide, 12,000 of our neighbors, friends, and coworkers reach out because they need help. Support LD 875 so that when the next generation of survivors call, someone will be there to answer.

Sincerely,

Amanda S. Cost