

Senator Grohoski, Representative Cloutier, and honorable committee members: My name is Hazel Willow. I'm a Domestic Abuse Survivor, advocate, and mom to a really amazing mini Mainer. I'm here to testify in favor of LD 1294, expanding the dependent exemption tax credit.

In the summer of 2020 I came home to Maine, to have my child grow up in an environment around family, in the freedom of the fresh Maine air. I had a good-paying job with a home office, I had a nice car, and I rented an adorable 4 bedroom Cape. I had everything.

And then I had nothing, because my abusive spouse ensured that everything good in my life was taken from me: My housing, my childcare, my family of origin, my health and my "good" 75K/ year sales job.

From the ashes of that life, my child and I are fighting to build something new. Social programs like MaineCare, TANF, SNAP, WIC and HeadStart have made all the difference for us.

During the pandemic, the expanded federal Child Tax Credit made a huge difference for Maine kids – leading to an estimated 40 percent reduction in the state's child poverty rate. Expanding the state DETC will make a big difference for us too. LD 1294 will make sure that families like mine with the lowest incomes – those who need it most – can access it.

Programs like the Dependent Exemption Tax Credit help kids their whole lives, and they allow people to afford child care so they can work and take care of their families. That's good for all of us.

Beyond that, for me and for other survivors of domestic abuse, the DETC and other anti-poverty programs like it aren't just about the money – it's about the impact of lifting families out of poverty. Giving access, autonomy, and dignity back to people who've had it stripped away by trauma and circumstance.

Programs like the DETC reduce the ramifications of domestic violence, because poverty as a consequence is a main tactic of abusers. If you can't afford to live without them

then how can you ever leave? If they control your access to childcare or economic independence they control you.

These programs also make it easier for people to leave abusive relationships and continue to care for their kids, by providing more financial stability. They provide a critical safety net to survivors, ensuring that their basic needs will be at least partially met while they heal from trauma.

No matter who we are, what part of the state we live in, or what our life experiences have been, we all want the best for our families. That was true for me when I was a middle class working mom, and it is true now as a mom living in poverty. Passing and funding LD1294 will help our children, our communities, and our economy flourish. Do this now – because an investment in our children is an investment in everyone.