

**Testimony of Leah Henry
to the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary**

**In Support of LD 1022
An Act to Protect and Increase Access to Justice
in Civil Legal Aid Matters for Persons with Low Incomes**

Date of Public Hearing: April 17, 2025

Good afternoon Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Leah Henry, I live in Portland, I am a third year law student and a student attorney with the Clinics at Maine Law.

I am testifying today in my individual capacity and in support of LD 1022.

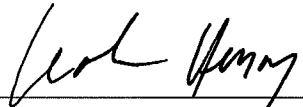
As a student at Maine Law, particularly as a student attorney with the Clinics, I know firsthand the impact civil legal aid can have on our community of Mainers. During my summer with the Clinics, I represented juveniles through the Youth Justice Clinic, aided incarcerated folks with civil matters, and offered limited representation to plaintiffs seeking Protection from Abuse orders. My continued work in the Clinics has focused specifically on the Protection from Abuse docket that runs every Friday in Lewiston. And during each of those Fridays, Maine Law students - with the help of a supervising attorney - become lawyers of the day. Once the docket is called, we introduce ourselves to our potential clients and offer our legal services to those interested. With few exceptions, the answer is consistently an immediate yes.

It was during one of these Fridays when I introduced myself to an older woman, someone who had never filed for a protection order, despite years of abuse as she would later describe. She was seeking a two year protection order from an ex-husband, and had a soft-spoken friend by her side for support. She, too, was soft spoken, and couldn't seem to shake the surprise from her face that she was receiving legal support on her scariest and most vulnerable day. I listened to her complaint, learned what her goals were for the order, presented it to the defendant, and by lunch time, we were before the judge with a negotiated agreement for a two year protection order. As she collected her paperwork, she took my hand and told me she had no idea I would be here today, no idea that she may have legal aid for such a daunting experience, since paying for a lawyer was never a possibility. Had she known a resource like the Clinics at Maine Law was out there, she said, she would have come a lot sooner. She would have fought for justice for herself a lot sooner.

Sustaining and increasing investment in civil legal aid is crucial for maintaining access to justice. The Protection from Abuse docket is just one area of focus at the Clinics, but a vital one for both a student's professional development and the civil legal aid benefit it provides. As a student attorney with the Clinics, I had the opportunity to sharpen my advocacy skills, improve my client management, and most significantly, offer substantial, meaningful legal support to clients very much in need.

My work in civil legal aid and public service has just begun. After graduation, I will join the Superior Court in Portland as a law clerk, and I am looking forward to a long career serving the community right here in Maine. As I often remark, it is a gift to attend Maine Law, as it is the only law school in this great state. As students, the spotlight is on us and opportunities to study and work in this close legal community are plentiful. In return, my fellow soon-to-be graduates and I look forward to giving back by helping those in the most need. We are asking you today to help us with our efforts, by sustaining and increasing Maine's investment in legal aid.

Thank you.



Leah Henry