

Testimony of Jane Brogan, Fayette

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

April 17, 2025

Good afternoon Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and the members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary,

My name is Jane Brogan. I live in Fayette, and I am going to share with you my experience with Legal Aid in Maine.

While volunteering as an English tutor in 2018, my student, Imane, an immigrant mother of an infant, disclosed to me that her husband was abusive. Besides instances of severe control and physical and verbal abuse, he was refusing to sign her immigration papers to renew her green card. She lived in constant fear that she would be deported and her husband would keep her child.

With virtually no experience dealing with such a grave situation, I sought advice from the director of Capital Area New Mainers Project, who directed us first to a local domestic violence agency and later to a civil legal aid agency to help with the threats her abusive husband was making to her immigration status. The domestic violence agency's helpline staff provided invaluable guidance until we were able to meet with the Civil Legal Advocate. Over the next few months, the advocate devoted countless hours to this case, providing information and advice and communicating with Imane almost daily to ensure her safety until she was able to move to the domestic violence shelter.

It was the Civil Legal Advocate who connected us with another Civil Legal Aid agency in September of 2019, before Imane had left her husband, to begin the process of filing for divorce. Both the advocate and the attorney assisted with the filing of a PFA and its subsequent enforcement. Over the next two years, the attorney spent innumerable hours assisting Imane through the myriad of issues involved with her divorce. There are no words to express our gratitude for this attorney's commitment through this very long and difficult ordeal, from procuring and monitoring compliance with PFA orders to the divorce, and later a Motion to Enforce related to visitation. Additionally, the attorney collaborated with Imane's immigration attorney at the other civil legal aid agency to compile Imane's history of abuse in order to allow her to apply for Permanent Residency with a waiver.

The attorney was unfailing in her willingness to help with every question, every incident (of which there were many), answering emails and taking phone calls well after the workday had ended. Beyond her extensive legal knowledge and meticulous attention to detail in all aspects of this process, the attorney's genuine concern, empathy, good nature, and sense of humor were ever-present. In the face of many a tense moment, the attorney had a knack for lightening the mood and putting us at ease. We shared many a laugh along the way, but when it came time for court appearances, the attorney's thorough preparations, presentations and professionalism not only resulted in positive outcomes for Imane, but also reflected the exceptional quality of service provided by this civil legal aid agency to low income Mainers.

Six years later, Imane is a US citizen living happily in Augusta with her daughter. She works and regularly volunteers within the local immigrant community. On several occasions she has offered guidance to women experiencing domestic violence as well as immigration issues, including some who lived in other states which do not have the services that Maine is able to offer. The cooperation between the domestic violence agency, and the two civil legal aid agencies was life-changing for Imane. As you consider funding for civil legal services, please reflect on her story as well as the positive impact these organizations have on many other low income Mainers who do not have the means to navigate the complex legal system on their own.