

TESTIMONY OF ANNE SEGALINI

Speaking 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 members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you and share my story. My name is Anne Segalini and I am here to testify in support of LD 1022, An Act to Protect and Increase Access to Justice in Civil Legal Matters for Persons with Low Incomes.

I am speaking today about an issue that many women fear retaliation for standing up to. I am here to share my and my children's stories as survivors of severe and sinister domestic violence and to highlight the crucial role Civil Legal Aid played in helping my children and me escape a decade-long cycle of fear, harm, and oppression. Their support was not only transformative but also lifesaving during a time when I was fighting for our freedom in the face of relentless physical, emotional, legal, financial and mental torment from our abuser.

After gaining the courage to leave our oppressor, the battle for safety didn't end. My abuser weaponized the legal system as a tool for post-separation abuse, with repeated violations of protection from abuse orders, the divorce decree, and deliberate delays in court proceedings. His financial resources allowed him to use attorneys to keep me trapped in legal coercive control. What could have been a costly fight for freedom was made manageable with representation from legal aid, who helped establish legal boundaries for me and my children. Those same Legal boundaries continue to be violated without any good faith effort by the offender to comply, as court orders hold no sway over those who are intent on causing harm.

The financial burdens of legal battles can be almost as crippling as enduring life in an unsafe home, especially for survivors like me who were isolated and made financially dependent on their abusers during this time of childbearing. Survivors like me shouldn't have to face impossible choices between paying legal fees to secure protection or affording basic needs for themselves and their children.

Legal Services provided the representation I needed when I had nowhere else to turn. It helped me navigate and secure the legal protections necessary to advance in a successful life.

Countless people in our communities face similar struggles—isolated, financially dependent, and subjected to abusers who use the legal system as a weapon. Civil Legal Assistance agencies are a lifeline for these survivors, offering vital support and the chance to rebuild their lives free from oppression for healthier communities.

Without Legal Services, survivors would be even more vulnerable to the power imbalance that abusers exploit. Without access to these critical resources, many survivors would be left defenseless, unable to navigate the complexities of the legal system or challenge the financial

advantages of their abusers. These agencies give hope to the women and children who feel hopeless in these situations like they did for us.

I urge you to prioritize funding for civil legal services. Their work is vital in helping survivors break free from abuse, achieve justice, and create safer futures. Vulnerable parents and their children must know they are not alone and that resources can help them reclaim their God-given lives. As a Mainer, I'm so proud that this state cares about domestic violence and acts with resources like Pine Tree and others. I hope this commitment extends to everyone who faces the pain of abuse. Thank you for your attention to this vital issue and your commitment to supporting those who need it most. Thank you again for your time and letting my voice be heard on this critical issue