

Testimony of Nicole Bernhardt of Waterville for LD1684

Good afternoon, my name is Nicole Bernhardt, I am with Finding our Voices, and I am hereto testify in favor of LD1684.

In June of 2023 the father of my two children, and my partner for over 5 years, almost murdered me with his bare hands. This occurred in a public place, in broad daylight, in Waterville Maine. I fought him off as he tried to strangle and beat me for what felt like eternity. He successfully strangled me unconscious until a bystander and a police officer were able to pull him off me.

He was sentenced last July to 18 years in prison for attempted murder. The reality of him getting out in 18 years is scary, the reality of him getting released early is even scarier. My life, my children's lives, and all whom I love, will be in grave danger.

When he almost killed me, he was out on \$5,000 bail. His conditions were to stay away from me and our children, have no contact, nothing. I'd had previous protection orders against him for hitting me, threatening me, and holding me and our children hostage in my house. He had been on probation before for a previous charge where he threatened to kill me, nothing ever worked.

Violent domestic abusers don't care about a piece of paper.

I would even say during those times the stalking, and the harassment became worse as if those orders put a target on my back because his anger towards me worsened. The bail conditions could not keep me safe, none of the protection orders could keep me safe.

There is no condition or paper, or monitoring system that could keep this man from hurting me or killing me as he intended to, the only thing keeping me safe is that he is in prison. The only thing keeping other women and Maine communities safe from him, is him being in total confinement. He is a dangerous person. There are many women who share in my experience and who haven't gotten as lucky as I, I survived, but some don't.

How many more people must die before Maine does something about it. This bill would protect myself, my children, and countless other women and victims. We talk about Class A and Class B Domestic violence crimes, but what do they look like. My ex committed both class A and B domestic violence crimes against me. I almost died, I had a broken nose, a severe concussion, an injured esophagus, I could not eat for a month, I could not speak for over two weeks, my ear drums were damaged and bleeding from the pressure of being strangled, the blood vessels in my eyes all popped.

I could not go out in public for months because of all the bruising, the mental and emotional toll it took on me affected my ability to mother my children and my family had to step in. I was in intensive counseling for almost two years, and I have PTSD because of the incident.

I still have episodes of vertigo, almost two years later, from what he did to me. Domestic violence is ugly, it's evil, and Maine victims and communities need to be protected from people who commit these atrocities.

This Bill would help do that. Thank you.