

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is April Tardiff. I am a proud resident of Old Orchard Beach, a person with lived experience deeply connected to this bill, and a passionate advocate for family rights.

I am here today to voice my strong support for LD 1566, a bill that finally acknowledges something we should have recognized long ago: **that lived experience is expertise — and expertise deserves to be honored, respected, and compensated.**

For far too long, individuals like myself have been asked to show up — to open our lives, our wounds, and our stories — to help fix systems that failed us. We're asked to serve on panels, testify, advise, facilitate summits — often with little to no compensation. Yet what we bring is irreplaceable. We offer insights no textbook can teach and no policy manual can write. Our lived realities hold the answers policymakers are seeking.

Over the past three years, I have been asked countless times to share my story, to advocate, to lend my heart and my hard-earned wisdom. Sometimes we are compensated, and sometimes... nothing is mentioned. Yet behind every appearance is a reality no one sees:

- The hours spent answering emails and calls.
- Crafting a speech, revising it, practicing to keep it under three minutes.
- Packing up my two-year-old, driving 150 miles round trip, hoping I've packed enough snacks and distractions for the day.
- Asking family for help with childcare, paying babysitters out of pocket, covering gas and car maintenance — all while my husband's paycheck carries the financial weight of my advocacy.

There have been moments where I was asked to help facilitate an entire summit, and no one even thought to offer compensation — until an advocate had to muster the courage to ask. And let me tell you: asking feels icky and selfish — and it shouldn't. It should be the norm to offer a stipend, to cover mileage, childcare, food. It should never be an afterthought. We are not guests at the table. We are experts at it.

When we are asked to show up, to bare our souls, to help guide systems toward justice — it costs us something. Time, money, energy, emotional labor. LD 1566 finally acknowledges that **our time, our stories, and our expertise are valuable — and they deserve to be treated with dignity.**

This bill is about fairness, yes — but it's also about sustainability. If we want real change, we must create a system where those with lived experience can continue to participate without sacrificing their well-being to do it.

I urge you from the bottom of my heart: Support LD 1566. Because valuing lived experience means valuing the people who live it — not just with words, but with action.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

April Tardiff
Old Orchard Beach, District 1