



# MCEDV.

The Maine Coalition  
to End Domestic Violence

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**Francine Garland Stark, on behalf of the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence  
In Opposition to LD 1337, "An Act to end the Maine Human Rights Act Regarding Female  
Athletes and Safety in Women's Single-sex Shelters"  
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary  
Thursday, May 8, 2025**

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary, I am writing on behalf of the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence (MCEDV)<sup>1</sup> to encourage you to not support the modification to the Maine Human Rights Act proposed in LD 1337 and to provide information on Maine's domestic violence shelters, their policies and practices, and the various laws and regulations that apply to them.

Maine's eight domestic violence resource centers operate a network of 12 emergency sheltering programs throughout the state.<sup>2</sup> In 2024, these programs provided shelter to 542 people, including 218 children – every one of them having experienced some form of acute trauma. Our sheltering programs are to be safe places for *all* survivors of domestic abuse and violence and their children – supportive environments that also offer comprehensive services to help survivors meet their both immediate needs for safety and stability and to also help survivors address the physical and emotional trauma they have experienced.

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<sup>1</sup> MCEDV serves a membership of eight regional domestic violence resource centers as well two culturally specific service providers. Together, these programs provided services to more than 12,000 victims of domestic violence in Maine last year, including court advocacy services in the civil and criminal courts.

<sup>2</sup> **Maine's Domestic Violence Shelter Network:**

*Caring Unlimited*, serving York County (operating one shelter)

*Through These Doors*, serving Cumberland County (operating one shelter)

*Safe Voices*, serving Androscoggin, Oxford and Franklin Counties (operating two shelters)

*Family Violence Project*, serving Somerset and Kennebec Counties (operating two shelters)

*Partners for Peace*, serving Penobscot and Piscataquis Counties (operating one shelter)

*Next Step DV Project*, serving Hancock and Washington Counties (operating one shelter)

*Hope and Justice Project*, serving Aroostook County (operating three shelters)

*New Hope Midcoast*, serving Sagadahoc, Lincoln, Knox, and Waldo Counties (sheltering program without a standing shelter)

Our sheltering programs are commonly thought of as sheltering programs for women and children. However, our programs could not be considered single-sex sheltering programs, in theory or in practice. Our shelters provide emergency refuge to victims of domestic abuse and violence and their accompanying children, regardless of sex, sexual preference, age, race, ethnicity, disability, gender or gender identity.

Our sheltering programs prioritize the emergency needs of a person or family to have immediate safe refuge above all other considerations. For a variety of reasons, our shelters do, at times, determine that a congregate shelter space is not the best arrangement to meet the needs of the individual or family in need of emergency sheltering. When that is the case, all of our shelter programs have the mechanisms, expertise, and community partnerships, to provide at least temporary alternative shelter to that person or family outside of the congregate shelter. Every year, there will be times when one or more of our shelters have an overall population that consists of adult survivors of different genders. State and federal law requires provision of shelter without regard to sex, sexual preference, age, race, ethnicity, disability, gender or gender identity, and the provision of emergency shelter to those with urgent safety concerns without regard to their identity beyond the reality that they are fleeing domestic abuse and violence these deeply aligns philosophically with the missions of all of our programs. For all residents of our sheltering programs, the biggest threat to their safety is their partner, spouse, or parent, none of whom are allowed in our shelters.

The current application of the non-discrimination mandates of the Maine Human Rights Act to the sheltering programs of Maine's victim services providers, which LD 1337 proposes to modify, aligns with the non-discrimination and accessibility mandates that our providers are already legally obligated to follow under the federal Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and the federal Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA). Stated another way, the modification proposed to the MHRA would not change the legal obligations that apply to domestic violence shelter operations in Maine, all of which are primarily funded with these federal dollars.

In 2016, HUD published a final rule, "Equal Access In Accordance with an Individual's Gender Identity in Community Planning and Development Programs,"<sup>3</sup> commonly referred to as the "Equal Access Rule." This federal Rule requires recipients of certain HUD funding to grant equal access to facilities and services in accordance with an individual's gender identity, and in a manner that affords equal access to the individual's family. In addition to those non-discrimination mandates under VAWA and FVPSA referenced above, our network of shelter providers are also obligated under this Equal Access Rule.

At the time the Equal Access Rule was proposed in 2016, MCEDV joined together with over 300 national, state and local anti-sexual assault and domestic violence organizations

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<sup>3</sup> Available at: <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/09/21/2016-22589/equal-access-in-accordance-with-an-individuals-gender-identity-in-community-planning-and-development>.



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(including both of Maine's other victim services coalitions – the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault and the Wabanaki Women's Coalition) in issuing a Consensus Statement<sup>4</sup> to support the need to protect transgender people's access to shelter consistent with their gender identity, as well as to dispel the myths that doing so is in anyway dangerous to other shelter residents. The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) community, and transgender people specifically, face alarming rates of domestic and sexual violence.<sup>5</sup> While we acknowledge our network still has work to do to improve inclusivity of services to meet the needs of all survivors, we are committed to those efforts, and we affirm our commitment to this Consensus Statement.

Our sheltering programs are staffed with advocates who have extensive training and who are supported by extensive policies responsive to a raft of common issues that arise in operating a congregate shelter space. Any disruptive behavior that might occur at a shelter, regardless of a person's sex, sexual preference, age, race, ethnicity, disability, gender or gender identity can be and is dealt with under existing shelter policies that apply to all residents equally.

If legislators are looking for effective ways to support the safety and stability of victims of domestic violence who need emergency shelter, on behalf of Maine's network of domestic violence service providers, what our programs desperately need is financial resources to sustain operations. We encourage Committee members to focus their efforts on support and advocacy for those funding measures that will require affirmative action by the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs in this difficult budget climate.

We hope that this information is helpful to you. If there is any way we can be of additional assistance, please do not hesitate to let me know.

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<sup>4</sup> Available at: <http://www.4vawa.org/ntf-action-alerts-and-news/2018/4/12/national-consensus-statement-of-anti-sexual-assault-and-domestic-violence-organizations-in-support-of-full-and-equal-access-for-the-transgender-community>.

<sup>5</sup> The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey. (December 2016). National Center for Transgender Equality. Retrieved from <https://www.transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/USTS-Full-Report-FINAL.PDF> on September 20, 2020.