



Testimony of Lucia Hunt, Esq.
Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Inc.

Speaking in Support of LD 2142

An Act to Establish Guidance for Awarding General Spousal Support

Date of Public Hearing: January 22, 2026

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

My name is Lucia Hunt. I am the directing attorney of Family Law and Victim Rights Unit at Pine Tree Legal Assistance, Inc., and I am speaking to you today in support of LD 2142, An Act to Establish Guidance for Awarding General Spousal Support.

I have been asked to share the perspective of Pine Tree Legal Assistance on these issues and I am speaking today on behalf of Pine Tree Legal Assistance (Pine Tree). Pine Tree is a nonprofit organization with offices in Portland, Lewiston, Augusta, Bangor, Machias, and Presque Isle. Since 1967, Pine Tree has provided free legal services to low-income people throughout the State of Maine. Attorneys in Pine Tree's statewide Family Law and Victim Rights unit represent survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking in civil legal cases, including divorce.

This bill modifies Maine's spousal support statute to:

1. Update the purpose and presumptions for an award of general spousal support
2. Establish a formula for the calculation of general support

These changes are important because they establish a baseline for calculation of general support. Without this starting point, practitioners, judicial officers, mediators, and the litigants themselves do not have any guidance about the appropriate amount of support. In the absence of a statutory formula, practitioners use many different calculations, leading to inconsistent and unpredictable results. Case law does not provide clear guidance.

Most family law litigants are unrepresented as they navigate the court process for divorce. At Pine Tree, we represent low-income litigants who would otherwise not be able to afford an attorney. When we speak to low-income family law litigants about their goals, they often do not know they can request spousal support, or what amount is a reasonable starting point for such a request.

In contrast, Maine's child support statute uses a formula for calculating guideline child support, including a rebuttable presumption that allows for deviation if the application of the guidelines

is inequitable or unjust.¹ Because of the guidelines, all litigants have a starting point for requesting child support, with flexibility to deviate if appropriate. A similar process for spousal support would increase access to appropriate spousal support awards and allow for similar flexibility as needed based on the facts of the specific case.

In one recent case, Pine Tree represented a survivor of domestic violence in a divorce. We were retained after the divorce case started. The opposing party had an attorney, and our client had been representing herself through the first court dates and mediation. Despite the length of the marriage and the fact that our client had stopped working to take care of the parties' child, the disparity in income potential that the parties had, along with other factors that qualified her for a general spousal support award, she did not know that she could request spousal support, or know how much to ask for. Having a formula like the one proposed in this legislation would help people like our client access support even if they are representing themselves.

Litigants who are already vulnerable, such as lower-income spouses with less financial resources, people without attorneys, and survivors of domestic violence, will continue to have difficulty asserting their right to spousal support without a formula to anchor that request.

Thank you to Senator Carney for sponsoring this bill, to FLAC for all their work on this issue and for proposing this legislation, and to this committee. Adding a spousal support calculation to Maine's existing statutory scheme would ensure consistency, fairness, and access for family law litigants. I urge you to pass LD 2142 and am happy to answer any questions.

¹ See generally 19-A MRS §§ 2005-2007