

**Testimony of Erin Mackintosh
to the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee
and the Judiciary Committee**

*LD 2212, An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations on the General Fund
and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of
the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending
June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027*

February 27, 2026

Senators Rotundo and Carney, Representatives Gattine and Kuhn, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Judiciary, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Erin Mackintosh. I am a third-year law student at the University of Maine School of Law and a student attorney at the law school's legal aid clinic, the Clinics at Maine Law, as well as a resident of Portland.

I am here to testify in my personal capacity about the critical role the Clinic plays in ensuring that low-income and vulnerable Mainers have meaningful access to justice.

My time in the Clinic has reminded me of something I had forgotten after so many semesters of law school: that the law isn't about statutes and procedures. It's about people. At the Clinic, it's often about the most vulnerable people in our communities. As a student attorney, I have represented victims of domestic violence and human trafficking, inmates at our state's correctional centers, and people in our communities living with disabilities. These are individuals for whom legal assistance would be out of reach if it were not for the Clinic.

As part of the Clinic program, the student attorneys attend the Protection-from-Abuse docket in Lewiston every week. On Fridays, we travel to Lewiston to provide limited representation to survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking. This work is indispensable to our clients, who gain an advocate who stands beside them in court, as well as to us student attorneys, who gain hands-on experience in negotiation, advocacy, and managing real client relationships.

I would like to share a story about one of my clients. I met her this past fall while working the PFA docket in Lewiston. She was 18 years old and seeking a protection-from-abuse order against her former dating partner. She was alone; no family or friends had come with her that day. All she had was her story of the abuse she had endured and a few text messages to corroborate it. By comparison, the defendant arrived with his attorney, witnesses, and what he claimed was credible evidence contradicting her account.

My client and I had never met before that day, yet we were able to establish trust: she trusted me to tell her story, and I trusted her not to waver in what she had set out to do that day. We stood by each other through five hours of negotiations and another two hours at a final hearing before

the judge. At the end of that day, my client received a two-year protection order with findings of abuse.

What struck me most about that day was not my client's courage, but how close she came to having no advocate at all. Without the Clinic, she would have been one more young woman standing alone in a courtroom, facing an experienced attorney and a system she did not understand. Instead, she had representation, a voice, and a fair chance.

This is what the Clinic does every day. It fills the gap between the rights people technically have and the rights they can actually exercise. It trains future attorneys to serve their communities with skill and compassion. And it ensures that justice in Maine is not reserved only for those who can afford it.

I urge the Committee to continue supporting the Clinic's work. The investment you make in this program is an investment in access to justice, in public safety, and in the next generation of Maine attorneys who will carry these values forward.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to the people of Maine.

Date: 02/27/2020

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