

**Testimony of Andrea Mancuso
In Support of LD 1305
“An Act to Streamline Requests for Housing Assistance”
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Tuesday, April 13, 2021**

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am writing on behalf of the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence (MCEDV)¹ in Support of LD 1305, “An Act to Streamline Requests for Housing Assistance.”

Like in every other state across the country, the overwhelming majority of survivors of domestic abuse and violence in Maine have experienced economic abuse by their partner.² In a 2019 study on the impact of economic abuse on survivors of domestic violence in Maine, nearly all respondents (93%) reported that the abuse they experienced affected their ability to meet their daily needs (food, shelter, clothing). More than half of all respondents reported that the economic abuse prevented them from either obtaining housing (57%) or maintaining housing (59%). Stable housing is a critical need for any survivor separating from the person who has abused them. Without it, economic independence is not feasible.

Effective and timely access to state and federal assistance programs often helps survivors attend to basic necessities and to more readily reach economic self-sufficiency after separating from the person who has abused them. In the 2019 Maine study, approximately half of all survivors (47%) indicated that they used some form of public assistance to support themselves and their families (Maine Care, WIC, SNAP, TANF, etc.) on at least a temporary basis. For all of these survivors, the proposal in LD 1305, by requiring existing public benefit applications to also ask whether they also have a need for help with housing, can only enhance access to and connection with much needed, relevant community resources. Streamlined access to stable housing supports can help to guard against the long term and detrimental impact of common financial retaliation tactics that many survivors

¹ MCEDV serves a membership of the eight regional domestic violence resource centers (DVRCs) across the state, as well as the Immigrant Resource Center of Maine. Last year, these programs together served more than 12,000 Maine survivors of domestic abuse and violence and their children.

² See "A Report on the Impact of Economic Abuse on Survivors of Domestic Violence in Maine," presented to the Maine Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary (February 7, 2019). Accessible at: <https://bit.ly/2Djs9f4>.

experience post-separation, and it demonstrates a positive level collaboration amongst and support by a survivor's broader community that can counteract that common refrain of those who abuse that nobody cares about the survivor and no one will help.

Though advocates at the domestic violence resource centers across the state regularly work to connect survivors with assistance and resources, challenges such as overwhelming administrative burdens and barriers and a high degree of inconsistency from local office to local office with regards to the application of the policies, rules or statutes of DHHS or General Assistance programs often result in leaving survivors and their children in shelter for longer periods of time or act to so insufficiently address basic needs in a timely way that the survivor begins to lose hope that real independence from the person who has abused them remains possible. These barriers contribute to the reality that many survivors cannot achieve independence from an abusive partner until after several separation attempts. We need to prioritize policies that aim to do better at bridging existing silos for Maine's most vulnerable citizens, and LD 1305 proposes one way of doing just that.

Thank you for the opportunity to be heard on this important bill. It is sound public policy and addresses an important need, and we urge you to support it.

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