



Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

Testimony of Whitney Parrish

Maine Women's Lobby

In support of LD 1171

An Act To Prevent Sexual and Domestic Violence and To Support Survivors

April 17, 2019

Senator Gratwick, Representative Hymanson, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Whitney Parrish, Director of Policy and Program for the Maine Women's Lobby. The Maine Women's Lobby is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, statewide membership organization devoted to raising the economic, social, and political status of Maine's 678,000 women and girls.

I am pleased to speak to you today in strong support of LD 1171, *An Act To Prevent Sexual and Domestic Violence and To Support Survivors*.

If passed, this legislation would allow for the first funding increase for domestic violence resource centers and sexual assault support services in nearly two decades. These resources disproportionately support women and female-identified individuals, and it is imperative that we build up and sustain these live-saving services not just for survivors and their loved ones, but as a strategy to build safer communities for everyone.

Prior to working here with you, I was employed as a domestic violence and human trafficking youth advocate and educator in Androscoggin, Franklin, and Oxford counties. In short, I was the one who trained law enforcement, hospital staff, and other community members on domestic violence and trafficking identification and response, as well as facilitating violence prevention education for young people ages K-12 and beyond. I was the one who facilitated support and education groups for young women experiencing sex trafficking and exploitation in the city of Lewiston. I mention all of these because I was the primary person providing these resources in my county and assisting in other counties, and my incredible (and incredibly stretched) colleagues were offering a host of other essential services.

If someone contacted me or my agency, I tailored violence prevention education for that audience at no cost to the community. If a young person reached out from a local homeless shelter or high school and needed resources, I was there to safety plan, accompany them to court, find sheltering options, and provide general support. Despite being no cost to the survivor or community, there is obviously a cost to the agencies providing these services. We desperately needed additional staff and funding. LD 1171

295 Water Street, Suite 10, Augusta, ME 04330 • 207.622.0851

wparrish@mainewomen.org

www.mainewomen.org



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gives hope that these services can be sustained and expanded, leading to safer families and safer communities.

Violence prevention and response services are a lifeline and resource for the entire community. We strongly urge you to vote ought to pass on LD 1171. Thank you for your time.