



March 10, 2025

Chair Scott & Members of the House Judiciary Finance & Civil Law Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.F. 1083, a bill to prohibit domestic abuse advocates from disclosing information acquired in attending victims in a professional capacity. Missions Inc. Programs is a social service agency located in Plymouth that provides housing and supportive services to individuals recovering from substance use disorder and/or experiencing domestic violence. In 2023 we served over 900 adults and children through our domestic violence shelter and legal advocacy program. Each of those individuals worked with one or more advocates to heal and access resources. Victims of domestic violence need to be able to trust that the personal information they share with advocates, often about deeply traumatic events, will not be used against them in court. That's why we need H.F. 1083 to ensure that victims of domestic violence have access to safe and confidential advocacy when they need it. When victims are supported with confidential and non-judgmental advocacy, they are better able to stabilize their lives and fully engage in their communities.

Notably, the current confidentiality limitations apply to *all* domestic abuse advocates, not just those that assist victims in civil or criminal court. Domestic abuse advocacy takes place in a wide variety of settings, including emergency shelters, community settings, and family court. For example, a victim living in an emergency shelter might experience a mental health crisis in the middle of the night or talk through major decisions with an advocate. Under current law, shelter advocates could be compelled to reveal information victims share in these vulnerable moments, which would significantly undermine victims' willingness to seek support.

In addition, the discrepancies between confidentiality protections for sexual assault advocates and domestic abuse advocates can create an unreasonable situation for victims. Currently, sexual assault advocates have a higher level of confidentiality privilege than domestic abuse advocates. Because many advocates are dually trained as sexual assault and domestic abuse advocates, this could create a situation in which a victim's disclosures about their sexual assault experience would be protected but their disclosures about domestic abuse, made to the same advocate, would not be. When victims are in crisis and seeking support, they should not have the added burden of censoring themselves based on which type of advocate they are speaking to.

Finally, protecting the confidentiality of communications between victims and domestic abuse advocates helps protect the unique role community-based advocates play in the public safety system. Community-based advocates work solely on behalf of the victim; they do not work for the prosecution nor the defense. Sometimes advocates are supporting a defendant who has experienced abuse and may not be communicating with the prosecution at all. Having a safe and confidential source of support enables victims to feel more confident participating in the court process if they choose to do so.

H.F. 1083 addresses a loophole in domestic abuse advocate requirements and ensures that victims have access to confidential support. Without these protections, victims will be more reluctant to access services and advocates will be less effective. Please support H.F. 1083 on behalf of victims of domestic violence in our communities. Thank you for your time and consideration of this bill.

Warm regards,

Katy Daniels, CEO
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