National Association of Social Workers

Good Afternoon, Chairman Patrick, Chairwoman Herbig and other honorable members of the Labor Commerce, Research and Economic Development Committee.

My name is Susan Lamb, I am the Executive Director of the Maine Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers and I live in Kennebunkport.

I am here today to speak in favor of LD 1238, "An Act To Improve Professional Training for Licensed Mental Health Clinicians" and I wish to laud Senator Cain for bringing the bill forth.

This bill is focused on the issue of creating appropriate additional training for many mental health providers in the area of identifying victims of domestic violence.

I grew up here and I can remember when murder was a very rare thing in Maine, but that is not the case today. It is shocking that about half of the murders in this state are related to domestic violence. Clearly, we all need to address this issue and I laud the Governor for making it one of his signature issues.

Domestic violence and mental illness are all too often connected and it concerns us that because of that, persons who have mental illnesses are feared and avoided. It is more likely for a person with a mental illness to be the victim of domestic violence than to be the perpetrator. Violent people are very cleaver at picking their targets.

"The prevalence of lifetime Inter Personal Violence among women diagnosed with depression was 61.0% which is approximately twice that of the general population." (Dienemann et al. 2000). The cost to society of domestic violence is very high.

And now, I will take a moment to digress so that you understand what that looks like:

My mother had bi-polar illness, which was a tragedy for her personally, and probably gave the rest of the family, and specifically her four children, the gift of learning compassion from a very early age. She married her second husband when she was 33.

Her fiancée was her pharmacist, so he knew what her illness was. Her psychiatrist told him not to get her pregnant again, as that could make her illness worse. She got pregnant on her wedding weekend and her pharmacist husband knew what he was doing. My brother was still a gift to us and he is not the issue. Her husband beat her regularly, because, who would believe a crazy woman in the 1960s? I tried to stop him when I was 13 and I am here to tell you that unlike Bill Clinton, I did not succeed. I got hurt myself. Domestic violence is everywhere, even among the so-called professional classes. My mother is gone now, but her abuser, whom she divorced after just three years, is still alive. If he owned anything at all, today, 45 years later, if there were no statute of limitations, I would sue him for all he owned. That is the picture of what domestic violence does. I could not protect my mother and that haunts me to this day.

Here are our concerns which we believe will be addressed in a friendly amendment that the supporters of this bill here today have agreed to bring to the committee before the work session:

- 1. We think it was accidental that the Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists were left out. The LCPCs were included. We understand that there will be a later bill for physicians, perhaps next year.
- 2. We need our social work faculty to have an opportunity to look at this and make sure it is workable for the schools of social work in Maine, and for those who attend schools of social work out-of-state to have sufficient time to get this training in Maine when they move here.
- 3. We think that there may be a need for specific exemptions for any mental health professionals who are so specialized as to never encounter a domestic violence client. Sometimes people do really work in silos.
- 4. At some point in the future, we think nurses and all other direct health care providers need some additional training on this issue.

Thank you for your time, and I would be happy to answer any questions.