

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Justina Kenyon. Today is the Vermont Network Against Domestic and Sexual Violence's Legislative Day so I am here to share with you some information about the services we provide at our organization and more specifically about my role as the Survivor Empowerment Coordinator at Safeline, the Network program that serves Orange and Northern Windsor counties.

First, thank you for your support of domestic and sexual violence victims. I appreciate your willingness to address the known lethality when firearms are present in domestic violence situations. In supporting H.422 you have made a difference for countless victims. Thank you also for taking up testimony on S.261 and addressing the issue of childhood trauma and toxic stress.

Safeline provides services to victims of domestic and sexual violence in person and through our 24/7 hotline. These services include: creating safety plans with survivors, assisting with legal paperwork, accompaniment to medical exams and forensic interviews, and economic and housing advocacy.

Many victims come to us with financial concerns. My job includes assisting these survivors with job searches, resume writing, applying for benefits, and budgeting. I also work to connect service users with other local resources and coordinate services with other providers. Additionally, I work with survivors to find emergency and permanent housing, while taking into account where their support systems and long term services are.

Our service users face a number of barriers when trying to secure a job and safe, sustainable housing. Primarily, is the lack of affordable housing, which extends across the state. Recently, we have worked with an increasing number of victims who are struggling to secure housing because they do not have references, as a result of living with their abusive partner for many years.

Another barrier, which is especially difficult in rural areas, is the lack of access to transportation. In order to get to work or to service providers, many of which are outside of Orange County, transportation is essential. Victims can get stuck in the cycle of not being able to buy a car because they don't have a job and not being able to get a job because they don't have transportation. While we do our best to work around these obstacles, they prolong the period when victims are living in dangerous or unsecure situations.

Thank you.