

Dear Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and members of the State and Local Government Committee,

My name is Kate Elmes and it's my great honor to be the Chair of Maine's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 794, An Act to Expand the Membership of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women.

I've served on the Commission for five years, joining shortly after moving back to Maine following graduating college. After attending school in Boston and then DC, I moved home because no other place provided me the same sense of home, community, and belonging that I've felt in Maine. I also knew that I wanted to dedicate my career to improving the lives of Maine women and girls and felt that Maine was a place where I could truly make a difference. Shortly after returning, I was introduced to incredible women like Senator Vitelli, Secretary Bellows, and my fellow Commissioner, the Honorable Meredith Strang Burgess. Through their mentorship and friendship, these women have taught me that we can judge a state, and how successful it will be, based on how it treats its women and its girls. Because of this, I jumped at the opportunity to join the Commission and in a leadership role to ensure that Maine continues our motto, *Dirigo*, in leading the nation, as we strive toward gender equity.

Among Permanent Commissions across New England and the country, Maine is not the leader in ensuring its Women's Commission has the funding and the membership necessary to be as strong, impactful, and helpful to policy makers as possible. Massachusetts' Commission currently has an annual budget of over \$1M and a staff of five, while Vermont has an annual budget of nearly half a million and a staff of two. With this full-time capacity, Massachusetts and Vermont are able to publish professional biannual reports that offer policy makers insights into the status of women and girls, and recommendations for policy solutions, with specific focus on topics such as women's economic security, women in the trades, women in STEM, older women, rural women, etc. They also host convenings that bring women from across their states together to discuss ways to increase opportunities and equity for women.

These are all activities that Maine's Commission would like to pursue and with the passage of LD 794, would have the necessary capacity to execute. Currently, with no funding, Commission members in Maine struggle to find the time and resources to do this critical work.

This measure is a low cost, low barrier way to stand with Maine women and girls and help us ensure that whatever our future holds, my own, and future generations have the resources necessary to close the gaps in gender disparities and secure full equality.

Thank you for your time and your leadership.



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