

March 31, 2023

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

My name is Dania Bowie, I am 27 years old, and I am writing **in support of LD 794**. I am a member of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. I work for the Maine Women's Lobby and live in Pittston with my partner. I sit on the board of Maine Inside Out and the Southern Maine Workers Center, as well as on the committee for the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Fund at the Maine Community Foundation.

I am asking you to support this bill because it is the first step toward building Maine's systems, which are central to informing policies that work for everyday folks, particularly women, girls, and gender-diverse folks. **The Commission needs funding and an increase in capacity, not only to better represent the variety of experiences of Maine women, but to deliver relevant information that is useful, accurate, and timely for the Legislature.** This investment goes well into the future to set up the systems required for policymaking work that brings us a step toward a gender-just future. I am so thankful to Senator Vitelli for sponsoring this important bill because it showed me that our lawmakers care about the health and well-being of our systems.

We all have lived the consequences of an inherited system not designed for women and children. Before the pandemic, we already knew our systems were very broken: In the 1990s in Kennebec County, my mother-in-law left her full-time employment to take care of three kids because it made more sense to stay at home than pay for childcare. Every day in my early childhood, my own mother, who immigrated with my father from the Philippines in the 1980s, dropped my siblings and me off at our cousins' house after school on her way to the hospital to work the night shift. After dinner, our dad picked us up from his day shift and brought us home. I spent most of my childhood not seeing my parents in the same room often or even having a sit-down dinner with them unless it was a special occasion. We missed important years. My mother-in-law, in her situation, lost years of income and retirement savings. Today, we know the crisis for care is worse and it doesn't just affect parents and children - it's affecting our economy, our health, and our overall quality of life in Maine. This is just one of many urgent gender issues our lawmakers are being called to work on for the people of Maine and the Commission was set up to help.

The Commission needs support to do its job. To identify the disparities and find the solutions to what we know - to what we are living - we must better support this Commission by passing LD 794 and increasing the Commission's capacity. Just a couple of statistics show the tip of the iceberg and snapshots of our current moment in time for women and children in Maine:

- Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, **over 5 million women and mothers have had to leave the workforce, devastating our economy and families.** Before the pandemic, mothers were 40 percent more likely than fathers to report that they had personally felt the **negative impact of childcare issues on their careers.**¹ The economic security for women is affected by inequity in our systems due to pay disparities, discrimination, and a lack of statewide programs such as Paid Family and Medical Leave.
- **Almost 70% of Maine children under the age of 6 live in households where all parents work.**² This means that parents miss out on the most formative years of their child's development, but also that the schedule of work for parents creates a gap in caretaking time and quality. This leads to poor health outcomes for children and families.
- The **average cost of daycare in 2021 for Maine families** ranged from close to \$5,500 a year for school-aged children to **over \$12,000 for infants.**³ These costs are a serious barrier to childcare in the current economy for parents, even if all the parents work full-time or multiple jobs.

What does this mean? It means that parents, particularly women who are still most often the primary caretaker of the household, are experiencing adverse economic impacts from our lack of systemic change since I was a kid. It's been over 30 years and we're still here right where my mother and my partner's mother were with childcare. **And the next generation of Maine children, as a result, are already experiencing the cost of gender inequity today.**

When we set up women and girls to thrive on a systems level, especially those women and girls from diverse backgrounds across race, age, class, etc. everyone benefits. Supporting the Commission is the first step. Please support LD 794. Thank you.

Dania Bowie

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¹McGrath, Maggie. Forbes. (January 12, 2021). *American Women Lost More Than 5 Million Jobs in 2020*. Retrieved March 2023 from

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/maggiemcgrath/2021/01/12/american-women-lost-more-than-5-million-jobs-in-2020/?sh=5a6181732857>

² The Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center. (Updated December 2022). Data Source: U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, *Table B23008: Children under age 6 with all available parents in work force, detailed in Maine*. Retrieved March 2023 from

<https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/7317-children-under-age-6-with-all-available-parents-in-work-force-detailed#detailed/2/any/false/2048.574.1729.37.871.870.573.869.36.868/any/14380.14381>

³ Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child and Family Services, Health Management Associates. (May 8, 2021). *2021 Maine Child Care Market Rate Survey*. Retrieved March 2023 from

https://www1.maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/inline-files/2021%20Market%20Rate%20Survey_Final%20Report_0.pdf