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March 28, 2023

RE: *LD 794, An Act to Expand the Membership of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women*

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

My name is Sue Mackey Andrews and I serve as a Commissioner in Maine's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, now in my second term. 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***.

In my at-large representation on the Commission, I am honored to bring the voice and advocacy on behalf of women in rural Maine. I have lived in Piscataquis County since 1979, raised my children here and worked in a variety of careers at the local, state and national level – all the while, living in Dover-Foxcroft. My most recent volunteer work has introduced me to a variety of women living, working, raising children and contributing to our great state. Through their eyes and voices, I have learned about the wide range of issues that a good majority of women in rural Maine – and very likely, throughout all of Maine – experience.

My exposure to other Commissioners and learning their stories and passions, has only reinforced the importance of the voices of women in every facet of Maine life – most especially in the realm of public policy. Our non-partisan membership enriches our conversations and the work we are assigned to do per Maine statute.

No other group, commission, state division or agency in Maine is statutorily assigned with this important task of informing policymakers about the salient issues and challenges, as well as opportunities the Maine women and girls – of all ages – face, every day.

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Passage of LD 794 will increase the membership of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women from 17 members to 19 members, requiring that the Governor appoint the 2 additional members, with one member representing the interests of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex or asexual persons and one member a person who has not attained 25 years of age. The bill also updates terminology describing other appointees and provides funding for one Public Service Coordinator I position to serve as executive director of the Commission/

My current volunteer work with our cross-sector, county-wide coalition is forged in community service, focused on marginalized residents as well as our children, youth and young adults. Every day, I come into contact with at least with one person most typically with a seeking help for a child, a parent, a neighbor and sometimes – for themselves. The overwhelming majority of these local residents are women.

As a Commissioner, I helped to research and craft our report to the Legislature last year, entitled *COUNT US IN: MAINE WOMEN, DATA, AND THE CARE ECONOMY.* This process was entirely supported by the Commissioners and included expansive research, interviews, and writing. We learned many things but the major finding that sticks with me is the disproportionate “hit” that rural Maine women, who were already behind economically before 2019, took during these past three+ years – and continue to take as our state and country strives to recover. The end result has been profound for too many women – disrupted education and careers which have been impossible to retrieve due to the gender wage disparity and lack of child care and exacerbated by the high cost of living.

We do believe that a state’s success can and should be judged by how it treats its women and girls. Right now, our girls and women are struggling and we at The Commission believe that our major mission is to provide leadership to ensure that Maine leads the nation in striving towards gender equity.

Our impact though is seriously negative limited by the fact that Maine is NOT the leader in ensuring that its Women’s Commission has the funding and the membership necessary to be as strong, impactful, and helpful to policy makers as possible. Other state Commissions such as Massachusetts and Vermont benefit from a modest state investment which staffing able to help to publish professional biannual reports to the

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legislature that offers insights into the status of women and girls, and recommendations for policy solutions.

It is important to the Maine State Legislature that we live our statutory assignment – *to inform key policy makers about policy and social issues affecting women and girls in Maine*. The investment of state funds will greatly the Commission to research and provide input on a variety of issues such as women’s economic security, women in the trades, women in STEM, older women, rural women, etc. Part of our work, as with many other states, would include hosting convenings to bring women from across Maine

together to discuss ways to increase opportunities and equity for women regardless of their residence, economics, education, age, etc.

With the passage of LD 794, we would have the necessary capacity to execute this statutory assignment. We don’t have funding to do surveys or research, or to print copies of our own biennial reports.

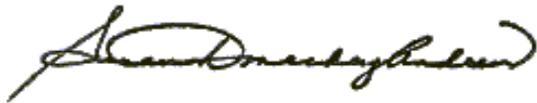
We are very appreciative of the support from the Office of the Secretary of State for her support and advocacy, and to this bill’s sponsor Senator Vitelli of Sagadahoc, Cosponsors Representative Cloutier of Lewiston, Senators Daughtry of Cumberland, Pierce of Cumberland, Rafferty of York, and Rotundo of Androscoggin and Representatives Cluchey of Bowdoinham, Jauch of Topsham, O’Neil of Saco, and Terry of Gorham.

I strongly urge your support for this Bill which represents a low cost, low barrier way to stand with Maine women and girls and help us to ensure that whatever our future holds, current and future generations have what is needed to close the gaps in gender disparities and secure full equality.

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Thank you sincerely for your time and your leadership, and for advancing the work of
the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women in Maine.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan D. Mackey Andrews". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "S" and "A".

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ⁱⁱ <https://www.maine.gov/sos/womens-comm/index.html>