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Testimony in SUPPORT of LD 1412

RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine Establishing That All Maine Residents Have Equal Rights Under the Law

April 23, 2023

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Legislative , Committee on Judiciary,

I am submitting this testimony in support of LD 1412, which will approve that this question be sent to the voters for final ratification. I am an appointed Commissioner on the Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Women currently in my second term. I bring the voice of women in rural Maine to the Commission.

Currently, men make up 48.9% and women make up 51.1% of the population in Maine yet women continue to earn less wage than men in our State, and nationally. The Commission fulfilled out biennial obligation to the Legislature last year, fulfilling our role per statute “ as a government appointed group dedicated to improving opportunities for women and girls.” As such, we advise the Governor and members of the Legislature about policy and social issues affecting women and girls in the state Title 5, Chapter 371-A: Permanent Commission on the Status of Women.

Women play a larger role in caring for young children, family members with disabilities, and aging parents, and comprise the bulk of the paid workforce in the care economy, which means the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a heavy toll on Maine women. This 2022 report explores the challenges our state faces in going beyond the broad grouping of "women" to better understand the race, ethnicity, age, disability, or other characteristics of women most affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic. (<https://www.maine.gov/sos/womens-comm/index.html>)

The Covid-19 Pandemic has had a disproportionate, negative impact upon Maine women, especially those in rural Maine. Domestic violence remains an intractable problem in Maine.

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The wage gap is closing so slowly, white men still earn 2.2 times what Black women earn in Maine and more than many White women in Maine. In our rural region, nearly 45% of women previously in the workforce have been unable to return to their jobs. Why? There is a variety of reasons but the most significant one is that their male partners make more money than they do, and this fact alone drives the decision about who will stay home with the children in light of losing more than 50% of our child care resources.

Current laws simply do not require the State to do enough to address the most severe patterns of inequality in Maine. The late Justice Antonin Scalia famously stated "Certainly the Constitution does not require discrimination on the basis of sex. The only issue is whether it prohibits it. It doesn't." Because we don't have these protections in the US Constitution it makes it doubly important that we have them in the Maine Constitution.

I strongly urge you to vote YES on LD 1412 to let the people of our great State vote to support the equal rights of women.

Thank you sincerely for your service to us in the Legislature. I recognize that it isn't always easy, but want you to know we are grateful for your contributions and service.

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'.

Susan D. Mackey Andrews

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