



**Testimony of Jena Jones on Behalf of  
the Maine Council on Aging to the Committee on  
Judiciary**

**In Favor of LD 1421 - RESOLUTION**, Proposing  
an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine  
Establishing That All Maine Residents Have Equal  
Rights Under the Law

Delivered on April 24, 2023

Greetings, Senator Carney, Representative Moonan, and the members of the Committee on Judiciary.

My name is Jena Jones and I am the Director of Policy and Advocacy at the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of over 135 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older community members working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age at home and in community settings. I am testifying in favor of LD 1412.

At the MCOA, when we advocate for our collective ability to age in a manner and space that allows us autonomy, dignity, and choice, we advocate on the understanding that *all* Mainers are afforded that right, regardless of age, physical or mental disability, gender identity and expression or sexual orientation, race, or ethnicity. For far too many older people within these groups, this is not their reality.

Last year, the Muskie School of Public Service published a data report on the Economic Security of Older Women in Maine, prepared for the Maine Women's Lobby Educational Fund and the Maine Council on Aging.<sup>1</sup> This report documents the devastating impacts of lifelong economic gender disparity on older women in Maine and nationally.

Here's the story the report tells: As a woman, I am likely making less than a male counterpart doing the same job and I will also endure the bulk of any familial caregiving burdens – both of these facts will impact my earning potential over my lifetime. When I am older, I am more likely to have trouble meeting my basic needs and am at a greater risk than men of developing a disability. If I were a Black woman, these challenges would be greater because of the discrimination I would face based on my skin color.

Specifically, the report shows that half of the 50,000 Maine women (65+) who live alone do not have enough money to meet their basic needs. Systematically disaggregating data reveals even more serious implications for women who are at higher age ranges, who live alone, and/or who are also members of BIPOC communities. Pay disparities between men and women, and the devaluing of caregiving work are major contributing factors to lifelong disparities in economic

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<sup>1</sup> <https://mainecouncilonaging.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Economic-Security-Older-Women-in-Maine-Report-FINAL.pdf>

status for women because women are disproportionately caregivers both as providers of unpaid child and older adult dependent care (which often takes them out of the paid workforce) and through employment in caregiving roles in lower wage jobs.

Rates of disability increase with age, and women experience higher rates of disability with age compared to men. Given higher rates of disability over time and increased life expectancy, women are more likely than men to need Long Term Support Services (LTSS) and less able to pay for them.

Much of our security later in life comes from our earning potential in our younger years. When people are systematically disadvantaged over a lifetime this security can remain out of reach. As our longevity increases and we continue to live longer than ever before, more people will financially struggle later in life if we do not ensure equal treatment, equal pay, and equal opportunity for all over a lifetime.

The protections offered by a Constitutional Amendment are more than legal rights. This is an opportunity to bring to light people who have too long been overshadowed and neglected, to firmly say that all Maine people have value and are worthy of protection from discrimination.

There is no more crucial time than now to enshrine the rights of all Mainers in our Constitution and indeed this great State has an obligation to protect each and every citizen within our borders. The MCOA passionately and proudly supports this effort, and we encourage this Committee to take the correct next step by passing this important bill.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions.

Jena Jones