



March 20, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Honorable Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has worked to build gender justice in Maine through legislative advocacy and systems change.

We are here today **in support of LD 117, "An Act to Provide Funding for Sexual Assault Services,"** and we thank Representative Duson for sponsoring this important bill.

Next week, March 25, is Equal Pay Day - the day that marks how long women have to work into 2025 to catch up to the same salary that men made in 2024. The difference in earnings between men and women working full-time, year-round in Maine is still about \$9,000 - and that is on average. The gap between white men and women of color is much wider, **as much as \$28,797 for American Indian and Alaska Native women.**<sup>1</sup> **That disparity has widened since 2016.**<sup>2</sup>

There are many reasons for this, but one of the primary reasons is that women's employment is clustered in low-wage, caregiving-focused industries.<sup>3</sup> **The workforces that are most likely to be dominated by women are some of the most undervalued \*yet essential\* workforces in our economy:** childcare, direct care, educational supports, and yes: anti-violence supports and services.<sup>4</sup> And in case you are wondering if women are simply choosing low-wage work, we would point out that wages actually drop in industries as the percentage of women grows.<sup>5</sup>

In addition to the gender pay disparity, this issue also touches on the gendered impacts of the services themselves. Though anyone can experience sexual violence, **most sexual violence either occurs against women or in gendered circumstances, such as the high rates of sexual violence that trans people and queer or incarcerated men experience.**<sup>6</sup>

**When issues specifically intersect with women's lives - whether it's childcare or sexual violence - they are more likely to be overlooked and under-addressed.**

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<sup>1</sup> US Census Bureau (2021). American Community Survey. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/table?q=median+earnings+by+race&tid=ACSST1Y2021.S2002>

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey, 2016-2020.

<sup>3</sup> : "Women in the Labor Force: A Databook: BLS Reports: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics." Accessed December 2, 2021. <https://www.bls.gov/opub/reports/womens-databook/2020/home.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> National Women's Law Center. (2017). Low-wage jobs are women's jobs. Retrieved from <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Low-Wage-Jobs-are-Womens-Jobs.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Levanon, et al. (2009). Occupational Feminization and Pay: Assessing Causal Dynamics Using 1950–2000 U.S. Census Data. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.0.0264>

<sup>6</sup> Dumont, R & Shaler, G. (2015). Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing public policy for safer communities. Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine



Sexual assault advocates are doing highly skilled, critical work, sometimes overnights, sometimes leaving family holidays to go to the hospital, sometimes meeting survivors in prison, sometimes missing multiple weekends in a row – and sometimes getting paid as low as \$33,000 per year. That's about \$15/hour - less than a living wage for an adult living alone in Maine, and only about half the living wage for an adult with one child.

**The fact that this is a gendered workforce, serving a gendered community, is likely not a coincidence. It is time to value the undervalued.** Like other industries such as childcare and direct care – and unlike private, small-business-based workforces - state and federal contracts and funding streams often dictate the terms of this employment. It is time for Maine to respond to this urgent need and invest in this critical state resource. **Sexual assault advocates are saving lives, and we should build a system that honors that fact.**

**We hope you will vote 'ought to pass' on LD 117.**

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Maine Women's Lobby