

*131st Legislature*  
***Senate of***  
***Maine***  
*Senate District 24*

*Senator Eloise Vitelli*  
*Senate Majority Leader*  
*3 State House Station*  
*Augusta, ME 04333-0003*  
*Office (207) 287-1515*

*Testimony of Senator Eloise Vitelli introducing*  
**LD 794, An Act to Expand the Membership of the Permanent Commission on  
the Status of Women**  
*Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government*  
**March 31, 2023**

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and Esteemed Members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Eloise Vitelli, and I proudly represent Senate District 24, which includes all of Sagadahoc County and Dresden. Today I am pleased to introduce LD 794, “An Act to Expand the Membership of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women.”

Over a decade ago, the 125th Legislature created the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. Shortly after its creation, Gov. Baldacci appointed me to chair the Commission. The Commission had the responsibility to “promote, carry out, and coordinate programs designed to improve opportunities for women in the state.” We also had to submit a report to the Legislature. However, there was not a funding mechanism to support the Commission’s work.

For the next ten years, the Commission had to rely on volunteer time to do its work or borrow data to compile its annual report. Commission members and others donated their skills and time in research, data analysis, writing, graphic design, and print shop. While I am grateful for the people who helped the Commission do its work, the Legislature can – and should – support this critical work. Without funding, the Commission has had to limit its overall scope.

LD 794, the bill before you, would provide funding for the Commission to hire an Executive Director. A full-time, paid Executive Director could help the Commission collect and present civic, economic, educational, health, and societal data on Maine women and girls. Accurate and timely data are critical for informing public policy, making expenditure decisions, setting state agency priorities, influencing state and local program planning, and conducting evaluations and marketing. In its most recent report, the Commission called for the Legislature to collect more data, particularly centering on marginalized women and girls. Such data includes:

- The percentage of women who work in the care economy, who depend on these services in order to work, and who are providing uncompensated care for their families.
- These data should include BIPOC women, as well as those with disabilities or who are caring for family members with disabilities.

- The extent to which BIPOC women and women with disabilities are enrolled in social services or public assistance programs for which they are eligible, and the extent to which eligibility (and demand) for these programs compares to enrollment.
- Better data interoperability to improve our understanding of women’s needs (and the extent to which they are being met) across systems, and throughout the state.
- Better data, and an improved ability to cross-correlate and compare multiple sets of data, are essential to plan, budget, execute, and evaluate programs and policies that support women and their families.

This work is vital for understanding how we can improve the lives of Maine women and girls.

The bill also adds two positions to the Commission to ensure more complete representation of women and girls life experiences in Maine. In addition, I would add two words as a sponsor’s amendment to the bill before you to read (lines 15, 16): “survivors of sexual or domestic violence.”

Thank you for your time, I will do my best to answer any questions you may have.



**Eloise Vitelli**  
Senate Majority Leader, Senate District 24  
*Sagadahoc County and Dresden*