



## Maine Women's Lobby

January 22, 2024

Senator Carney, Representative Monnen, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary,

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 780, Resolution, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to Protect Personal Reproductive Autonomy**, and thank Senator Vitelli for sponsoring this important bill.

Since the *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision eliminated federal abortion protections, 14 states have passed near-total bans and it is expected that at least half of all states are at risk for bans.<sup>1</sup> The damage of these limits is most acute on historically excluded or marginalized people - BIPOC and rural women, and low-wage workers or those in poverty, and queer and trans communities.

**Abortion access and reproductive health care serves public health, the well-being of families, and is the cornerstone of gender equity.** Since the pandemic, 5 million American women have left the workforce<sup>2</sup>, the gender pay gap has actually increased by about \$1,000 per year<sup>3</sup>, and the cost in lost productivity to our state strictly related to the childcare crisis has more than doubled, to about 403 million.<sup>4</sup> The childcare crisis primarily impacts women - in fact, in a recent Maine study, so few men shared lack of childcare as the reason for leaving the workforce that it was not statistically significant<sup>5</sup>.

**In short, reproductive freedom has become even more central in the work for gender equity in recent years, at a time when that freedom is shrinking nationally. Maine has an opportunity to do better.**

---

<sup>1</sup> New York Times. (Updated April 28, 2023). Tracking the States Where Abortion Is Now Banned. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2022/us/abortion-laws-roe-v-wade.html> . See also Center for Reproductive Rights, interactive map, at: <https://reproductiverights.org/maps/abortion-laws-by-state/>

<sup>2</sup> Forbes. (June 12, 2021). American Women Lost More Than 5 Million Jobs In 2020.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/maggiemcgrath/2021/01/12/american-women-lost-more-than-5-million-jobs-in-2020/?sh=341387ec2857>

<sup>3</sup> Cutler Institute. (2022). The Economic Security of Older Women in Maine: A Data Report. Retrieved from <https://www.mainewomen.org/s/EconomicSecurityOlderWomeninMaineReport-FINAL2.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Ready Nation. (2023). The Growing Annual Cost of the Infant-Toddler Child Care Crisis in Maine. Retrieved from <https://www.strongnation.org/articles/2173-the-growing-annual-cost-of-the-infant-toddler-child-care-crisis-in-maine>

<sup>5</sup> Cutler Institute. (2022). The Economic Security of Older Women in Maine: A Data Report. Retrieved from <https://www.mainewomen.org/s/EconomicSecurityOlderWomeninMaineReport-FINAL2.pdf>

Last year this legislature made significant strides in securing reproductive rights; however, the fragility of these gains is evident as they face potential challenges with each election cycle. The hard truth is that laws can be repealed and basic human rights should not be up for debate every election cycle. A constitutional amendment is the only way to ensure that our current rights are guaranteed for future generations.

Basic rights, including reproductive autonomy, should not be subject to the uncertainties of electoral outcomes. This amendment is a crucial step towards ensuring that the rights Mainers enjoy today are safeguarded from the unpredictability of future elections. Our Maine state constitution protects fundamental human rights, but we must be explicit: **reproductive rights are fundamental human rights.**

**We hope you will vote Ought to Pass.**

Sincerely,

Destie Hohman Sprague  
Maine Women's Lobby