



Maine Women's Lobby

February 20, 2024

Senator Baldacci, 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 2199, An Act to Ensure Subsidy Reimbursements and Emergency Financial Assistance for Certain Child Care Providers**, and thank President Jackson for sponsoring this important bill.

You're hearing today stories about how childcare is more expensive and less accessible than ever, and the impact that has on families. We're here today to draw some connections between these high costs, and the impact they have on the lifetime earnings of women in Maine.

Women are the backbone of all unpaid caregiving in Maine, and they make up over 60 percent of Maine's unpaid caregivers.¹ Maine women are far more likely than men to cite childcare or other family or personal obligations as the reason for working part-time - in fact, too few men cited childcare concerns as their reason for working part time to show a statistical sample.²

This delayed or truncated employment is a primary reason why women's participation in the workforce is at its lowest point in over 30 years.³ And this has lifetime consequences: **women in Maine are twice as likely to live in poverty than men during their retirement years**, specifically as a result of interrupted participation in the workforce.

You've heard the phrase, 'the workforce behind the workforce.' I want us to remember that when the childcare systems fall through, it is almost entirely women who pick up the pieces by stepping out of the workforce, forgoing years of contributions to social security or retirement savings. **The effects are even more powerful when we consider race and racism, and the effects on Black, brown, and Indigenous women.**⁴

¹ Maine CDC. (2019). Maine Caregiving Infographic. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/aging/data/infographic/2019/maine-caregiving.html>

² Cutler Institute (2022). Economic Security of Older Women in Maine. Available at MaineWomen.org/publications

³ National Women's Law center. (2023). Another 275,000 Women Left the Workforce in January. Retrieved from <https://nwlc.org/resource/january-jobs-day-2021/>

⁴ Boston indicators (2022). Care Work in Massachusetts: A Call for Racial and Economic Justice for a Neglected Sector. Retrieved from https://www.bostonindicators.org/reports/report-detail-pages/care_work

Without statewide investment in caregiving infrastructure to ensure that all families can access affordable, high quality childcare, women must pay the costs. Maine has made powerful strides forward in recent years but we must do more, and these subsidies support unpaid caregivers, their children, and the small businesses and organizations that provide such essential childcare and early education services in our communities.

We hope you will vote Ought to Pass.

Sincerely,

Destie Hohman Sprague
Maine Women's Lobby