



Department of the Secretary of State Permanent Commission on the Status of Women

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Secretary of State

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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

L.D. 135 “An Act to Provide Compensation to Members of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women to Enhance Equitable Commission Participation from Across the State”

Testimony of Shenna Bellows Secretary of State
Department of the Secretary of State

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Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, Members of the State and Local Government Committee, my name is Shenna Bellows, I reside in Manchester, and I am the Secretary of State. I am here with Elinor Higgins, the Executive Director of Maine’s Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. We are speaking in support of L.D. 135 “An Act to Provide Compensation to Members of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women to Enhance Equitable Commission Participation from Across the State.”

Currently, the 19 appointed members of the Commission are not authorized to receive per diem payments or reimbursement for travel expenses incurred while serving the women of Maine. While we recognize that this does not present a challenge for every Commission member, it is a barrier to the robust participation of some members – or potential members – whose voices and experiences are critical for meeting the Commission’s purpose of improving opportunities for women across Maine. While the Commission holds most of its meetings in a virtual setting, it convenes in person once each year for a planning meeting and members are encouraged to attend events in Augusta or elsewhere throughout the state to learn about the issues facing women, to meet with legislators, or to promote the work of the Commission. Currently, Commission members reside across 9 of Maine’s counties, from York to Aroostook. The burden of unreimbursed travel falls disproportionately on the Commission members who reside far from Maine’s urban centers – and who represent Maine’s rural women. In some cases, rural Commission members have also had to pay out of pocket for overnight lodging in order to attend Commission events. We know this is an issue that state legislators – especially those from Maine’s rural areas – know well.

This bill would make it possible for us to support Commission members from across the state to ensure fairer participation in the Commission’s work – and fair representation for the voices of rural women. It would also authorize a per diem for Commission member participation in bi-monthly virtual meetings throughout the year. Commission members work in various sectors of the Maine economy, and for some, taking time off from work to attend a Commission meeting means losing needed income.

We appreciate your consideration of this important bill – it will support positive outcomes for Maine women, especially working women, low-income women, and rural women. I am happy to take any questions and we will be available for the work session if needed.