



Maine Women's Lobby

February 24, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs; and Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyer, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services;

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has advocated for gender-responsive and gender-equitable public policies, with a focus on those most affected by misogyny, sexism, and other forms of oppression.

Gender-based disparities in Maine are structural and persistent. For example:

- Maine women are far more likely than men to cite childcare or other family or personal care obligations as the reason for stepping out of the workforce or working part-time – which has lifelong effects on retirement savings and economic security¹. Indeed, older women are twice as likely to live in poverty as older men².
- In just one specific health-related example: in 2022, only 65.6% of pregnant Black Mainers and 87% of pregnant white Mainers received “adequate prenatal care”³ – while the U.S. has the **highest maternal mortality rate in the developed world**⁴. The structural nature of these realities are clear: Since 2015, Maine has seen the closure of seven obstetrics units⁵, with an eighth closing in 2025⁶ and a ninth suspending birthing services⁷ starting March 1, 2025.

There is no single driver for these structural problems, but we know that there are a range of solutions which begin in the budget-making process.

Unfortunately, the budget before you undermines some of the most powerful ways to build gender equity - echoing some of the most troubling themes we are seeing from Washington, D.C. right now.

¹ Cutler Institute of Health. (2022). The Economic Security of Older Women in Maine. Retrieved from <https://www.mainewomen.org/s/EconomicSecurityOlderWomeninMaineReport-FINAL2.pdf>

² Ibid.

³ Maine Center for Disease Control & Prevention. Maternal and Child Health Data Dashboard. <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/population-health/mch/mch-data-dashboard.shtml>

⁴ The Commonwealth Fund. (2020). Maternal Mortality in the United States: A Primer. Retrieved from <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/issue-brief-report/2020/dec/maternal-mortality-united-states-primer>

⁵ Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Maine Perinatal Health Disparities Needs Assessment (2023). <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/population-health/mch/documents/ME%20Perinatal%20Needs%20Assessment%20-%20All%20Components.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.pressherald.com/2024/11/07/mainehealth-to-close-birthing-center-in-belfast/>

⁷ <https://www.mainepublic.org/health/2025-01-23/northern-light-inland-hospital-in-waterville-suspends-birthing-services>

The proposed budget:

- **Cuts of \$20 million from childcare funding**, including from worker stipends which will reduce the average earnings for nearly 7,500 child care workers by \$4,000 over two years, and reduce the overall access to childcare in Maine, slowing our economy. This cut is especially concerning given that this funding was considered and duly passed by the Legislature, the independent branch of government charged with the power of the purse, but not included in the budget.
- **Cuts to food assistance and income supports for New Mainer families** who have work authorization, but may not yet have employment. This needless targeting of basic needs and immigrants saves very little money while making life incredibly difficult for a very small group of already vulnerable Mainers, and echoes some of the targeting and misinformation we are seeing from Washington D.C.
- **Fails to fund the network of essential family planning services** (35,849 individuals accessed this care in 2022) even in a time when these funds have been stalled locally and slashed nationally. Lack of funding will result in reduced access to essential health care primarily for rural, low-income, and families of color, further compounding health and economic disparities.
- **Offers only half the needed funding for core sexual and domestic violence services**, which will upend the critical resource infrastructure irreparably.

The budget before you undermines the hard work the Legislature has done to address the realities that low- and middle-income people in our state are facing. But it doesn't have to be this way. When we were here before the Appropriations and Taxation Committees, we urged the members to recognize that **the primary driver of these cuts is the choice to sustain continued tax breaks for higher-income Mainers, instituted in 2011.**

The White House recently presented a budget which echoes these same themes: rolling back core services, targeting the vulnerable, and dismantling infrastructure, in large part to fund tax breaks for the wealthy and corporations.

We urge the committee to build a budget that supports Mainers - rural Mainers, low-income Mainers, Mainers of color, pregnant Mainers, those who have experienced sexual and domestic violence, those who would like to join the workforce but need quality affordable childcare, and so many more. These services are infrastructure, and like a highway or a bridge, they don't simply pop up or power down. They are an investment that recognizes and responds to the needs of Maine families, and **we hope you will build a budget that reaffirms the commitments that this body has already made.**

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Destie Hohman Sprague, Executive Director