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***Testimony of Rep. Lynn Holland Copeland introducing
LD 522, Resolve, Directing the Permanent Commission on the Status of
Women to Study the Extent of Workforce Gender Segregation in the State
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Labor***

Good morning, Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder and honorable members of the Labor Committee. My name is Lynn Holland Copeland, and I represent House District 130, which is a part of Saco. I am here today to introduce **LD 522, a Resolve, Directing the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women to Study the Extent of Workforce Gender Segregation in the State.**

This bill directs the Secretary of State's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (hereinafter, the "Permanent Commission") to find the full extent of any workforce segregation by gender in our state. The Permanent Commission released their biennial report last year, and among the findings, a few of stood out to me.

Maine's direct care workforce, including in-home care, residential care and nursing homes, is primarily made up of women. However, also referenced in the report, the median hourly wage for direct care workers in Maine is \$16.47. Per Massachusetts Institute of Technology, commonly known as MIT, using their living wage calculator, the living wage for an adult with no children is \$23.22. That is a \$6.75 difference *per hour*! For adults with at least one child, that number jumps to \$41.17. Therefore, direct care workers in our state are already starting well below a living wage while working a job that is difficult and critical to the health and wellbeing of older Mainers, single mothers and many others.

Maine has the highest population¹ of adults 65 years or older nationally and many of them rely on some sort of direct care. As a result, women in our direct care workforce are being disproportionately affected by wages that haven't been keeping up with the cost of living and inflation, while working a job that is crucial to our state.

There is a serious gender wage gap here in Maine. The Permanent Commission's report states that between 2018 through 2022, the median annual earnings for women amounted to \$48,496 annually. For men, it is \$58,619, which is a significant wage gap of \$10,123. Women are making roughly 83% of what men are, every year. (Emphasis added.) This disparity drives economic

¹ <https://www.prb.org/resources/which-us-states-are-the-oldest/>

insecurity and forces serious financial instability to women, especially ones who may be single parents, to consider working even harder by having a second job in addition to looking after their child or children or finding affordable childcare, therefore adding another layer of emotional and financial stress to their lives. Our children deserve better.

In addition, there is also an earning disparity between mothers and fathers. In the same period, 2018 through 2022, the median annual earnings for women amounts to \$41,000 and for fathers \$60,791 leaving a gap of \$19,791. The report also points out that single women face significant hardship with 35% of those households are *living below the Federal Poverty Level*. This is outrageous and unsustainable. Do we want other women and the mothers who provide care for children and senior citizens to also do so with such a gap? It is not fair and continues to devalue the importance of, and impoverish, women in our state.

These disparities often have real, life-long effects such as increased stress, which, in turn, can lead to health issues down the road. Maine women and Maine families deserve better.

This bill authorizes the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women to collect and further study these discrepancies and find targeted solutions that benefit all Mainers, especially the women of Maine.

Thank you for your kind attention and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.