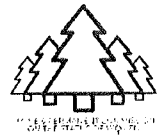


Department of the Secretary of State
Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Women



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JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON LABOR

L.D. 522 “Resolve, Directing the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women to Study the Extent of Workforce Gender Segregation in the State”

Testimony of Shenna Bellows, Secretary of State, Department of the Secretary of State
Testimony of Elinor Higgins, Executive Director, Permanent Commission on the Status of Women

March 12, 2025

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, Members of the Labor Committee, my name is Elinor Higgins. I am a resident of Portland, and I am the Executive Director of Maine’s Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. The Commission is a government appointed group, created in state statute to improve opportunities for women and girls. The Commission advises the Governor and members of the Legislature about policy and social issues affecting women and girls across Maine. Today, I am speaking on behalf of the Commission in support of L.D. 522 “Resolve, Directing the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women to Study the Extent of Workforce Gender Segregation in the State.”

In December, the Commission released a report on Maine women’s labor, employment, and economic security.¹ One striking piece of data in the report was the high concentration of Maine women in education and health care industries. In 2023, almost 40% of Maine’s working women were employed in education and health care compared to 13.3% of Maine’s working men.

“Education and health care” encompasses a wide range of different jobs and roles, like nurses and doctors, teachers, school or hospital administrators, early childhood educators, and more. But the Commission’s report zoomed in to take a closer look specifically at the direct care workforce. Here are some of the findings:

- The organization PHI, which maintains workforce data about direct care workers, found that 87% of Maine’s direct care workers are women.
- According to data from the Immigration Research Initiative, 20% of home health aides in Maine are immigrants.
- The United Way ALICE Index – which is produced nationally and in Maine - estimates that the hourly wage required for a single adult to reach financial stability in Maine is \$24.66.² This is slightly higher than estimates from the MIT Living Wage Calculator, which says that the hourly

¹ Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. (2024). “A Report on Maine Women’s Labor and Economic Security.” Available at: <https://www.maine.gov/sos/womens-comm/documents/MaineStatusOfWomenReport2024.pdf>
Note: Data cited throughout this testimony is drawn from the report apart from the citation below – please see link above for further citations and information.

² United for ALICE. (2024). Research Center - Maine. Available at: <https://www.unitedforalice.org/stateoverview/maine>

rate an individual person in Maine must earn to support themselves is \$22.04. The median hourly wage for direct care workers in Maine is \$16.47.

- Across Maine industries, nursing and direct health care service provision have some of the highest rates of injury and illness.

This is the type of data that L.D. 522 directs the Commission to gather and share with lawmakers – but for a much broader swath of industries and sectors than we were able to look at for our 2024 report.

The Commission recognizes that many factors go into an individual person’s decision-making about work and employment. However, we continue to see Maine women concentrated in roles that are undervalued despite their critical importance to the state economy – something that upholds gender disparities and impacts economic security. These disparities only become more pronounced when we further disaggregate data across categories like rurality, age, race, ethnicity, or disability.

While we see this research as critically important for understanding the Maine employment landscape, we are also working to balance the many competing issues that go into improving opportunities for women and girls in Maine. By supporting L.D. 522, you will be allowing us to prioritize this workforce study. This study will inform smart, targeted policy to ensure that women and their families—including those in rural and marginalized communities—have fair access to economic opportunities.

The Commission would be glad to conduct further research about the landscape of workforce gender segregation in Maine. This is an important and multifaceted issue, and it builds on the work of our 2024 report. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony today and we encourage you to support L.D. 522. Thank you again for your time and attention.