



March 12, 2025

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor,

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 before you today in support of "LD 522 Resolve, Directing the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women to Study the Extent of Workforce Gender Segregation in the State" and we thank Representative Copeland for sponsoring this important bill.

Women have always played vital roles in the workforce, however, as we've shared in previous testimony this session, that work has been systemically undervalued, underpaid, or unpaid¹.

One of the major drivers of the wage gap is occupational segregation - when certain demographics are over-represented in a certain workforce or job type. While the term 'occupational segregation' isn't frequently featured in conversation, if I said 'women's jobs' you would automatically picture jobs that have been dominated by women - teachers, nurses, and the like. 'Women's jobs' are historically caregiving roles like home health aides or childcare workers, and are some of the lowest paying jobs in the workforce. In Maine nearly 85% of caregivers are women², and women, especially women of color, make up a disproportionate share of workers earning low wages.³

This segregation affects the economic security of women in the immediate sense, and is connected to women's higher rates of poverty and use of basic needs resources such as TANF and SNAP. This wage gap is also cumulative⁴; a highly gender segregated workforce means that women enter their older years far less financially secure than men, creating a future where thousands of older Maine women can't meet their basic needs⁵.

¹ National Partnership for Women and Families. (2023). Women's Work Is Undervalued, and It's Costing Us Billions. Retrieved from

<https://nationalpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/womens-work-is-undervalued.pdf>

² Muskie School of Public Health. (2020). Maine State Plan on Aging: Needs Assessment. Retrieved from https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/inline-files/2020-2024_Maine_State_Plan_on_Aging_Needs_Assessment_Report.pdf

³ Center for American Progress. (2019). Rhetoric vs. Reality: Not All Paid Leave Proposals Are Equal. Retrieved from

<https://www.americanprogress.org/article/rhetoric-vs-reality-not-paid-leave-proposals-equal/>

⁴ Cutler Institute of Health. (2023). Economic Security of Older Women in Maine. Retrieved from <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5fe258011006361ee2898809/t/6217ec5b97c0541cc3a76406/1645735003998/Economic+Security+Older+Women+in+Maine+Report--FINAL+%282%29.pdf>

⁵ Ibid

Beyond economic security, workforce segregation has other impacts on these communities. Discrimination is disproportionately perpetrated against people who have fewer resources⁶ and work lower wage jobs, affecting women and people of color at higher rates. Industries that rely on lower-wage, female-dominated workforces are more likely to have high rates of sexual harassment⁷.

The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women is Maine's premier resource for compiling, analyzing, and presenting state- and population-level data for decision makers. A study from the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women on the extent of workforce gender segregation in Maine would be invaluable to ongoing efforts to address the problem. As we face intersecting challenges to sustaining our state's workforce, studies like this will not only help to strengthen economic security and opportunities for thousands of Maine women, but it will help to strengthen our overall workforce and state economy's sustainability and health.

We hope you will vote 'ought to pass' on LD 522.

Thank you for your time, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.
Destie Hohman Sprague, Executive Director
Maine Women's Lobby

⁶ US Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. (ND). Healthy People 2030: Discrimination. Retrieved from <https://odphp.health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/discrimination#cit3>

⁷ Center for American Progress. (2017). Not Just the Rich and Famous. Retrieved from <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/not-just-rich-famous/>