



March 14th, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and 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 worked to build gender justice in Maine through legislative advocacy and systems change.

We are here today in support of **LD 709 An Act to Establish the Respite for ME Program** and we thank Representative Cloutier for sponsoring this important bill.

Care work is the invisible underpinning of our economy. This care work - the paid or unpaid work of looking after the physical, emotional, and developmental needs of others - is also highly gendered, and 85% of Maine caregivers are women.¹

Unpaid family care work seems "free," so it gets left out of many policy conversations. But care work comes at a cost, including caregivers' and parents' ability to fully participate in the workplace, save for retirement, find time to give back to our communities, and do what they need to for their families. **This unpaid care labor means women are more likely to work part-time or to leave the workforce altogether, limiting their ability to access health insurance or save for retirement, and reducing Social Security benefits in later life.** The total individual lost wages for a woman who leaves the labor force early because of caregiving responsibilities equals \$142,693. When the loss of Social Security benefits is factored in (estimated at approximately \$131,351), along with lost pensions (approximately \$50,000), an individual female caregiver can experience an economic loss of around \$324,000.²

So much of **our work at the Maine Women's Lobby focuses on building this care infrastructure because it is so inextricably tied to the health and wellbeing of women, AND to a healthy, thriving economy.** Families need care, whether that is tending to new babies or caring for dying parents, and most of that care is provided by women in our culture. The added labor disrupts their work life, and because most companies don't have policies to accommodate this, so **caregivers forgo their incomes (destabilizing family economic security), or leave their jobs, or work less than they would otherwise - destabilizing the workforce.**

LD 709 does not solve this complex problem, but it creates a broader path to acknowledging the emotional and financial costs of care within our system. Care infrastructure is a systemic problem, demanding a systemic solution. Respite for ME offers

¹ Morhardt, D. (unk). Gender differences in family caregiving. Northwestern University. Retrieved from: <https://www.caregiving.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/9NAC-Morhardt.pdf>

² MetLife Mature Market Institute. (2011). The MetLife study of caregiving costs to working caregivers. Retrieved from

<https://www.caregiving.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/mmi-caregiving-costs-working-caregivers.pdf>

a single home within DHHS to acknowledge the role of caregivers, and ultimately to administer commonly held information, connections, and resources to support these family caregivers in the way they deserve - as befits their critical role in our economy. Respite is essential to high quality caregiving, and establishing this program acknowledges that.

We hope you will vote 'ought to pass' on LD 709.

Thank you for your time, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Destie Hohman Sprauge, Executive Director
Maine Women's Lobby