



January 20 2026

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyers and Honorable Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

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 1932 "An Act to Support Essential Support Workers and Enhance Workforce Development" and thank Speaker Fecteau for sponsoring this important bill.

You've heard the phrase, 'the workforce behind the workforce.' **Care work is part of the essential infrastructure of our economy and our communities.** Care work is what allows participation in the labor market – for the partners and children of aging adults, for the parents of children with certain disabilities, for families with a wide variety of needs. Care work provides respite to hard-working families. Care work provides competent, skilled support that family and friends are often unable to provide.

Despite how essential this work is, caregivers—whether they care for children, elders, or differently abled people—are underpaid and undervalued. And over 80% of all direct care workers in Maine are women.¹

One of the key factors in the persistent gender wage gap is the continual disproportionate representation of women in critically underpaid fields: **In Maine, the median annual gap in earnings is over \$10,000 between women and men, with larger disparities for Black, brown, and Indigenous women.²** Without direct, intentional investments into fields like care workers to raise wages, this economic inequality will only grow.

LD 1932 is a key step towards treating the care industry with the same support and care that these workers provide so many Mainers. We cannot continue to underinvest in this critical element of our economy– Without clear efforts to recruit workers into a workforce they feel confident can support them, coupled with efforts to retain these workers, our care systems will fall through. When this happens, it is almost entirely women who pick up the pieces by stepping out of the workforce to provide unpaid care for loved ones, forgoing years of contributions to social security or retirement savings. **The effects are even more stark when we consider race and racism, and the effects on Black, brown, and Indigenous women.³**

Without statewide investment in our care infrastructure, women will continue to pay the costs. **We hope you will vote Ought to Pass on LD 1932.**

Lily Bohen James,

Maine Women's Lobby

¹ Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. Biennial Report 2024. <https://www.maine.gov/sos/sites/maine.gov.sos/files/content/assets/MaineStatusOfWomenReport2024FINAL-1.pdf?mci=3e666974-36f5-f011-8d4c-0022482d279b&emdi=330da03b-38f5-f011-8d4c-0022482d279b&ceid=6024660>

² Ibid.

³ Boston indicators (2022). Care Work in Massachusetts: A Call for Racial and Economic Justice for a Neglected Sector. Retrieved from https://www.bostonindicators.org/reports/report-detail-pages/care_work