



Maine Women's Lobby

February 19, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs; and Senator Grohoski, Representative Sayre, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation;

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has advocated for gender-responsive and gender-equitable public policies, with a focus on those most affected by misogyny, sexism, and other forms of oppression.

I joined you here yesterday to speak to the **structural and persistent gender-based disparities and the range of solutions which begin in the budget-making process and investments into our "gendered infrastructure."** I will again highlight just a few examples:

- **A functioning child care infrastructure is the net that allows the rest of the economy of our state- and country- to function.** However, the current economics around the child care industry don't add up, and it's women who bear the brunt of this harm. Each session, we chip away at addressing the various, overlapping challenges our child care infrastructure faces, but **fail to make the desperately needed sustained investments to actually shore up this industry.**
- **Our sexual and domestic violence victim/survivor support services are gendered infrastructure and a public health response, addressing the trauma experienced by nearly a third of all women.** We saw the key impact of the one time funding passed last session- by raising the salary floor for advocates to \$45,000, turnover in the field has decreased from a high of 60% to under 20%. But, **unless this funding is made ongoing, this progress will be for naught.**
- **Finally, our family planning services provide the sexual health and primary care safety net for much of rural Maine, with escalating attacks on reproductive freedom at the federal level making the need more urgent than ever. The \$2.25 million proposed in the Supplemental Budget is a crucial investment to offset the most immediate impact of the federal de-fund, but a more stabilizing mechanism with further investment is needed to strengthen the system.**

We urge the committee to build and pass a budget that supports women and *all* Mainers - rural Mainers, low-income Mainers, Mainers of color, pregnant Mainers, Mainers who are caregivers, those who have experienced sexual and domestic violence, those who would like to join the workforce but need quality affordable childcare, and so many more.

The desperately needed investments into our gendered infrastructure, however, cannot ever meet the moment without reforming our outdated, inadequate tax system. Tax fairness is a gendered issue on both sides of the equation: Women earn less than men, but currently see a larger proportion of their income taxed, and programs that support women are continually underfunded by the state. **A fair budget must be coupled with a fair tax system.**

Our partners at the National Women's Law Center sum it up well:

"The tax code's treatment of inherited wealth and preference for income from wealth over income from work allow the very wealthiest – disproportionately white men – to pay lower effective tax rates than what workers pay on their wages. Together, these tax policies exacerbate, rather than rectify, historic and current race and gender wealth disparities...Insofar as those with enormous wealth and those who receive substantial income from their assets are far more likely to be white men than they are to be single women or people of color, reforming the tax code's wealth preference is an important part of a gender and racial justice."¹

Every year, a budget is carefully crafted based on projected revenue and funding streams. And every year, funding for critical services are pitted against each other and the legislature is forced to make difficult decisions about what to fund and what gets left behind. These decisions don't have to be this hard– Instead of repeating that there isn't funding for programs, we could instead be making needed changes to how we grow revenue for our state. **And the reality is that all the services mentioned above– and so many more– simply cannot be sustained by one-year or unreliable funding fought for year over year.** Businesses, clinics and agencies must be able to make long term decisions on how to run and operate, and clients and patients must be able to have faith in the network of gendered infrastructure across our state.

And the need for more state revenue has also never been so important– In the wake of the Trump Administration's H.R. 1 which slashed hundreds of billions of dollars of government program spending in order to "pay for" *even larger* tax breaks for the ultra-wealthy and big corporations, the state must take bold action to fill in these egregious gaps both through our spending and revenue sources.

While we have important state laws on the books that, for example, protect the right to a full spectrum of reproductive health care, these rights must be met with adequate funding to ensure clinics stay open and Mainers *have actual access* to these critical services. **A fair tax structure and a fair budget is the way we actually realize the promise of our good policy and adequately serve and meet the needs of Maine women and all people.**

Together, your two committees can work together to move us toward a more gender-just Maine. We hope you will build a budget that centers fairness in revenue, and justice and care in expenditures. Thank you for your consideration.

Lily Bohan James

Maine Women's Lobby

¹ <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/NWLC-ReckoningTheHiddenRules-accessibleNov12.pdf>