



January 11, 2022

Dear Senator Dill, Representative O'Neill, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation, and Forestry,

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. We support systems and proposals which increase the health, wellness, safety, and economic security of all people in Maine.

We write today **in support of LD 174, "An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Ending Hunger by 2030 Advisory Group."** We thank the sponsor, Rep. Pluecker, and the members of the Advisory Group for the excellent work in their report.

I was grateful to have a chance to review a draft of the excellent work of the Ending Hunger Advisory Group, and as I read through it, I noticed the intersections with gender equity on nearly every page.

- African immigrants in Maine are the subcommittee most likely to experience food insecurity in Maine. They are also 57 percent women.¹
- Single-parent households are also among the most affected by insecurity, and in Maine, these homes are twice as likely to be headed by women.²
- People in low wage-earning jobs, such as restaurant workers and home health aides, are disproportionately affected and once again, are more likely to be women.
- Others who experience the harmful effects of sexism and misogyny, such as queer and trans community members, were also noted to experience higher rates of food insecurity.

These data points mirror our findings during our development of the 2020 Policy Roadmap for Women's Economic Justice. We interviewed key stakeholders and partners across 45 different organizations and state agencies, and repeatedly heard that basic needs – especially food insecurity – were integrally connected with the wellness of women and people who are harmed by structural sexism. For this reason, we led our report by naming **increasing access to basic needs as a central solution to address gender justice in Maine, and the critical need to do so through structural changes** which eliminate underlying causes that keep Mainers hungry.

The findings in our report echo the work of the Advisory Group. Participants shared:

- *"SNAP is a tool of healing. **Let's talk about the trauma of not being able to put food on the table for your family.** Food is about healthcare and restoring people's humanity."*
- *"Our communities are eating more fresh fruits and vegetables than ever, because that's what we decided to purchase for the food pantries [with COVID relief money]. I can*

¹ Migration Policy Institute. (2019). Maine Demographics and Social Indicators. Retrieved from <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/demographics/ME>

² US Census Bureau. (2022). American Community Survey. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=maine%20household>



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*celebrate that as a short-term success, but I don't want to forget the long-term strategies we need in place in terms of **public policy measures to eliminate food insecurity.***"

- ***"If you don't have food to eat, are you going to think about birth control? Your head isn't there. I always think about the basic human needs that people need to be stable and healthy so that they CAN think about the next step - financial literacy, education, birth control."***

The Ending Hunger by 2030 Advisory Group has proposed a range of comprehensive policy solutions that not only ensure that people have nutritious food to eat, but which seek to address the underlying conditions which create hunger. We know that we will not end food insecurity – or gender inequity – until we are working at the roots of the issues. By addressing state food infrastructure, local food systems and climate, economic diversity, reimagining our public benefits systems, and more, this report is a powerful change to move toward a more gender-equitable and more food-secure future. We could not support these recommendations more fully and thank the committee for its good work.

Please vote 'ought to pass' on LD 174.

Sincerely,

Destie Hohman Sprague, Executive Director
Maine Women's Lobby / mainewomen.org

The 2020 Policy Roadmap for Women's Economic Justice can be found at <https://www.mainewomen.org/mwlef-roadmap>. The Roadmap identifies data and policy solutions to increase gender equity across the topics of economic security, civil rights, healthcare and reproductive justice, and systems and representation.