

Anne Gass
Gray
LD 794

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and distinguished members of the State and Local Government Committee.

I am writing in strong support of LD 794. I was appointed to the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) in 2019 by then House Speaker Sara Gideon. I was thrilled to be asked, and excited to serve with this group of women who brought such skill, talent, and dedication to this important work.

I understood the position was unpaid and was willing to volunteer my time. It soon became clear to me that, while we appreciated the limited logistical support provided by the Secretary of State's office, we were completely hobbled by not having any budget at all with which to do our work. And then, several months after my first meeting of the PCSW, the Covid-19 epidemic shut the state down.

The havoc caused by the pandemic has been labeled the “she-cession” because it disproportionately affected women, who struggled to balance their demands of family and the vital work they were doing in front-line jobs such as childcare, education, and health care. As women, many PCSW members experienced this ourselves. Together, we grieved the hardships caused by the pandemic for our members, for all women, for everyone, and struggled to understand the breadth and depth of the impact, both short- and long-term.

In the midst of all this we had a report to write and deliver to the legislature and the Governor, and we managed to do this despite the pandemic. It was really hard. It was especially difficult because we had no staff, and no budget to help us with this critical work. We even had to borrow Zoom technology from partners in order to hold webinars, much needed in order to hear testimony from people around the state about the needs of women and girls, because the license the Secretary of State's office did not permit this. We had no budget for printing or postage. Our webpage is decades out of date and until recently we didn't even have our own email address where people could reach us. Frankly, I found it embarrassing to have to beg for and borrow even the most basic tools we needed in order to do our work effectively. I wonder whether a commission made up entirely of men would be asked to do such important work with no resources.

All PCSW members have families and are leaders in a variety of paid and volunteer positions; that's precisely why we were recruited to serve. These responsibilities limit our ability to do, for example, original research into the needs of women and girls, and to effectively partner with others who are serving this population. Everything we do for the PCSW is time taken from our families, our employers, from our evenings and weekends, and juggling these many demands takes its toll. The resources proposed under LD 794 would allow us to deliver data and recommendations to the legislature and the Governor that support the critical policy and budget decisions that you must make.

During my service on the PCSW it's been clear to me how critical it is to have a diversity of voices. It is for this reason that I wholeheartedly support expansion of the PCSW's membership to include members representing LGBTQIA+ Mainers and youth under the age of 25. We truly are stronger with a wide range of perspectives.

Finally, I support the language updates that will make the Governor-appointed seats more in line with current language usage. Language evolves over time, and it makes sense to use more inclusive language as part of LD 794.

Thanks very much for your attention.