

JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

L.D. 135 “An Act to Provide Compensation to Members of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women to Enhance Equitable Commission Participation from Across the State”

February 10, 2025

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, Members of the State and Local Government Committee, my name is Darylen Cote. I have been a Commissioner on Maine’s Permanent Commission on the Status of Women for five years. I was appointed to seat #12 pre-COVID and was subsequently reappointed. I am writing to support L.D. 135, “An Act to Provide Compensation to Members of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women to Enhance Equitable Commission Participation from Across the State.”

Of the 19 Commission members, I am one of only four who live north of Bangor. As a proud resident of Caribou in Aroostook County, I particularly represent the needs of rural women and the ability to have a voice on a Commission such as this. It has been my experience that the cost of participation is a barrier to me and many of my friends, neighbors and colleagues. There is no reimbursement available for actual dollars spent out of pocket for necessities such as accommodations, meals or travel expenses when in-person events are called for. The last time I needed to attend in person the only hotel room I could find was a little over \$200, and you all know the price of gasoline and meals in a restaurant. From Caribou to Augusta and return is approximately 480 miles. I gladly volunteer my time to do this work for the women of Maine, especially the women in my rural, isolated part of Maine. However, being retired and on a fixed income, the added actual cost is a burden and barrier to maximum involvement in the work – as it would be for most people in the northern and other parts of Maine that are sparsely populated, and that struggle with poverty.

I support this bill because it would help to even the possibilities for adequate representation from all parts of Maine on the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women. We all deserve to have our voices heard equitably. The lack of reimbursement for actual expenses, and even for some portion of time, should not remain a barrier to that goal.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,
Darylen Cote