



February 10, 2025

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government,

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. Since 1978, the Maine Women's Lobby has worked to build gender justice in Maine through legislative advocacy and systems change. We are before you today **In Support of LD 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**. Thank you to President Daughy for sponsoring this important bill.

Many of our government structures weren't originally built with women in mind. The imprint of those early decisions still exists today, even when so much has been done to move us forward. Despite progress, **gender is still a key driver in the health, wellness, and economic security of Mainers.**

- In 2023, Governor Mills and the Dept. of Labor pointed out that **the median income for full time, working women in Maine is still nearly \$10,000 than the average income for men<sup>1</sup> – the gap is far higher for women of color<sup>2</sup>, and it has widened since 2016<sup>3</sup>.**
- In 2022, only 65.6% of pregnant Black Mainers and 87% of pregnant white Mainers received “adequate prenatal care”<sup>4</sup> – while the US has **the highest maternal mortality rate in the developed world<sup>5</sup>**. The systemic nature of these realities are clear: Since 2015, Maine has seen the closure of seven obstetrics units<sup>6</sup>, with an eighth closing in 2025<sup>7</sup> and a ninth suspending birthing services<sup>8</sup> starting March 1, 2025.

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<sup>1</sup> Maine Dept. Of Labor. (2023). Press Release: Governor Mills Proclaims March 14 National Equal Pay Day in Maine.

<sup>2</sup> US Census Bureau (2021). American Community Survey. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/table?q=median+earnings+by+race&tid=ACST1Y2021.S2002>

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey, 2016-2020.

<sup>4</sup> Maine Center for Disease Control & Prevention. Maternal and Child Health Data Dashboard. <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/population-health/mch/mch-data-dashboard.shtml>

<sup>5</sup> The Commonwealth Fund. (2020). Maternal Mortality in the United States: A Primer. Retrieved from <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/issue-brief-report/2020/dec/maternal-mortality-united-states-primer>

<sup>6</sup> Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Maine Perinatal Health Disparities Needs Assessment (2023). <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/population-health/mch/documents/ME%20Perinatal%20Needs%20Assessment%20-%20All%20Components.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.pressherald.com/2024/11/07/mainehealth-to-close-birthing-center-in-belfast/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.mainepublic.org/health/2025-01-23/northern-light-inland-hospital-in-waterville-suspends-birthing-services>

- Nearly one-quarter of Mainers have experienced rape or attempted rape in their lifetime, **women at more than three times the rate of men (35.7% vs 10.1%).**<sup>9</sup>

**These are all systemic challenges, and they need and deserve systemic solutions, embedded in state government.**

**Maine's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women is a key body helping to create systemic change.** A body devoted to gendered data collection and report creation has an exponential impact on other governmental agencies as well as programmatic and policy-focused organizations: **the work done by the Commission is important in its own right, and it informs the work done by so many groups across the state.** Further, especially poignant in a moment when research and reports from Federal agencies devoted to inclusion and anti-discrimination are being wiped by the new Presidential Administration<sup>10</sup>, having a consistent home for gendered data collection is fundamental to ensuring Maine is making consistent progress on gender equity.

**We are thrilled that the Commission now has one full time employee, for the first time since the 1990s. We have already seen the benefits of a devoted and focused leader and facilitator for the otherwise fully volunteer Commission. And despite the limitations of being a fully volunteer group, the Commission has done significant and essential work.** However, the limitations of fully volunteer, unpaid Commissioners are clear on both sides of the coin. First, the ability to volunteer one's time unpaid is too often a barrier to participation in activities. Compensation for public service is central to ensuring equitable and accessibility representation and civic engagement. Additionally, providing compensation for Commissioner's efforts recognizes the value they provide to the State of Maine.

**It's time for the state to invest meaningful resources to ensure that government structures and branches have gender equity as part of a systemic focus, that they are adequately staffed and funded, and that data be collected, analyzed, and presented in accessible ways across departments.** Providing compensation for members of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women is critical to continuing to create the systemic investments needed to create the necessary systemic change we need in Maine.

**We hope you will vote Ought to Pass on LD 135. Thank you for your consideration.**

Sincerely,

**Lily Bohem James, Advocacy Coordinator**

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<sup>9</sup> Dumont and Shaler. (2015). 2015 Maine Crime Victimization Survey: Informing Public Policy for Safer Communities. Retrieved from [https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/maine\\_statistical\\_analysis\\_center/5/](https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/maine_statistical_analysis_center/5/)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.npr.org/sections/shots-health-news/2025/02/06/nx-s1-5288113/cdc-website-health-data-trump>