

# ADVOCATE

## OUR 2009 LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

### Under the Dome

#### Economic Picture Colors Lobby's Legislative Agenda

In the face of a long and deep recession, women and men across the State face extreme economic anxiety. So far, layoffs have been concentrated in male-dominated industries, such as construction and finance—increasing the relative importance of women's income to the family during tough times. This dynamic is likely to shift as the economic downturn expands across sectors and more women workers suffer the consequences of unemployment. These conditions, combined with an \$800 million State budget shortfall, form our legislative landscape in 2009.

During bad economic times, our work to increase wages, bolster economic development, and address the intersection between work and family becomes even more important. Policies to help women and families weather the economic storm are critical. Unfortunately, as author and organizer Ellen Bravo points out, "Our country still has outdated workplace policies, based on the assumption that workers are men with wives at home full time." The reality, of course, is that three out of four women with school-aged children are in the workplace and that family obligations are in fact increasing because more and more people have the responsibility of caring for adult family members. During an economic downturn, it is imperative that women with family responsibilities not see their jobs put at risk simply because of these outdated assumptions.

No one should have to risk their job to care for a family member—or put their family at risk just to do their job. Unfortunately, however, that's a risk Mainers face every day. The reason? There are no explicit prohibitions against hiring or firing workers based on assumptions about their family responsibilities. For example, many women are surprised to learn that they are actually protected from workplace discrimination when they are pregnant but that that protection ends when they have a child. Here's how it plays out: A new mother finds that she is overlooked for a promotion. When she asks why, her employer replies that she couldn't possibly take on more responsibility in her job when she has a young child to care for.

When an employer judges a worker's ability and performance based on assumptions about duties at home (not gender), it's called **family responsibility discrimination**—and it should be

against the law. Our members have shared similar stories with us, and the evidence is piling up around the country that there is a gap in protection for family care providers—a gap that affects women and men who provide care for children or disabled or elderly family members. That's why the Maine Women's Lobby will work to save jobs by eliminating discrimination based on family responsibilities.

The bottom line is that it's time to bring workplace standards up to date with the needs of today's families.

For this reason, guaranteeing workers a minimum number of paid sick days remains a priority for the Maine Women's Lobby, and momentum is building around the country for this common-sense workplace standard. Voters in Milwaukee recently enacted a ballot initiative requiring paid sick days by a vote of 69%. States across the country and nearly every state in New England are in the process of submitting legislation to provide paid sick days. Even the new presidential administration has made a public commitment to making sure every worker gets a paid sick day. In 2009, our field work will take the spotlight:

*continued on page 2*



House Speaker Hannah Pingree greets the crowd. Maine Women's Lobby members, as part of the Maine Can Do Better Coalition, lined the halls of the House and Senate chambers and cheered legislators on the first day of the session to thank them for their service to Maine.

community meetings, opportunities for e-action, and a grassroots campaign will help promote this issue at the state and federal level.

Strengthening families is also at the root of our work for marriage equality (see related article). The only way to ensure that gay and lesbian families have access to the comprehensive web of family supports to which heterosexual couples are entitled is through marriage for same-sex couples. In 2009, the Maine Women's Lobby will advance marriage equality as a matter of basic civil rights and as a critical economic protection for Maine families. Loving, committed, same-sex couples need and deserve ALL the rights that come with being married.

Basic economic protections will also be at issue as the legislature debates the State budget. As part of the Maine Can Do Better Coalition, we will be promoting a balanced approach to the budget crisis while calling upon our congressional delegation to help ease the burden by quickly passing a recovery package with direct fiscal relief to states.

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## Endowing Linda's Legacy

### Linda Smith Dyer Fund Campaign Marks Milestone



Thirty years ago, Linda Smith Dyer's passionate advocacy for women's rights launched a statewide effort to guarantee that women were influencing the policy decisions that affect their lives. Her vision endures through the Linda Smith Dyer Fellowship.

Maine Women's Lobby members may remember Linda as a brilliant attorney, stalwart advocate, and leader. Her experience included serving in Governor King's Administration, practicing law in Augusta, and lobbying at the State House. Linda has a special place in Maine as the key founder and visionary behind the Maine Women's Lobby.

Her legacy continues as the organization – the largest and most successful of its kind in the nation – works to secure her vision. Linda's gifts as an attorney and advocate are also nurtured through the Fellowship established in her name seven years ago. Linda Smith Dyer Fellows provide research, advanced analysis, and sophisticated public policy development in support of the Maine Women's Policy Center's mission for women and girls.

In 2008, the Maine Women's Lobby and Maine Women's Policy Center launched an exciting effort to expand and fully endow the program established in Linda's name. The Maine Women's Policy Center Fund at the Maine Community Foundation has been established to manage this restricted endowment, which will help us expand the scope and influence of the Fellowship and create new opportunities for legal research and analysis on issues related to women and girls.

Our goal is to raise \$275,000. Thanks to the leadership of Linda's family and the support from our campaign committee and lead donors, we have very nearly met this goal.

Thanks to each and every contributor of this very special effort! For information about the campaign or to make a contribution, contact us at 207.622.0851. Tax-deductible contributions can also be made by check or credit card (VISA, MasterCard, or American Express) to the Maine Women's Policy Center/Linda Smith Dyer Fund, PO Box 85, Hallowell, ME 04347.

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## From the Executive Director

### Full Equality is Marriage Equality



This year, the Maine Women's Lobby will join the Maine Freedom to Marry Coalition in advancing a bill to extend civil marriage rights to same-sex couples. Undoubtedly, the debate will be a heated one. Because of the controversy,

I'm often asked: Why marriage? Why now? The simple answer is that the Maine Women's Lobby has a mandate to oppose discrimination – in all its forms.

It is our belief that every couple deserves the dignity and respect that marriage brings – as well as all the legal rights and obligations that come with it. But, because the State denies these benefits and responsibilities, same-sex couples are at risk.

Thousands of same-sex couples throughout Maine who have been in committed relationships for years have weathered life-threatening illnesses, are raising children, etc. Despite these commitments, they lack basic health, life, and property protections guaranteed to heterosexual couples.

When my husband and I married eight years ago, we did so to make visible our commitment to each other and to invite our community of friends and family to join with us in honoring that commitment. We were hardly cognizant of the intricate web of benefits and protections that our marriage certificate included. Only after several years together and through supporting friends and couples in their partnerships did the life-altering privileges of marriage become visible to me.

The fact is that marriage provides more than 1,138 federal benefits, protections, rights, and responsibilities to heterosexual couples and their children. These include Social Security survivor and spousal benefits, the ability to file a joint tax return, immigration rights, and coverage under the U.S. Family and Medical Leave Act. Denial of these protections translates into real-life, heart-breaking situations from not being able to take time away from work when a partner is ill to someone else making crucial medical decisions in emergencies. The list goes on.

Most importantly, marriage protections extend deeply to children.

Lesbian and gay parents must weave together an expensive quilt of legal action in order to mimic the parental rights and responsibilities afforded by marriage. Yet in the eyes of the State, a lesbian or gay partner who is raising their child is considered a legal stranger. When all couples are allowed to marry, all children will be protected by our existing family court system.

Friends and allies also ask, why not civil unions? My answer is simple: civil unions are inadequate. By definition, civil unions cannot capture the extent of federal protections provided by marriage, nor do they impart the same level of dignity, respect, and loving commitment that marriage confers. But, most fundamentally for me is this: In our democracy, we do not create separate institutions for different groups of citizens. Separate is not equal.

As an organization dedicated to creating equality for Maine women and girls, we work for a woman's right to choose when and whether to bear children and to exercise full control over her personal reproductive and sexual life. We believe that women should be supported in their fundamental life decisions, including choices of whom they love and whether and whom they marry. Prohibiting marriage of same-sex couples denies them the protections guaranteed to heterosexual couples and violates our belief in equal rights and equal opportunity.

I hope you will join with me and the Maine Women's Lobby team in promoting—and defending—the freedom to marry in Maine.

Sincerely,

Sarah Standiford  
Executive Director

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## Coming Soon to a Browser Near You!

We commemorated the Maine Women's Lobby 30th anniversary in 2008, and as part of that celebration, we developed a fresh, new look. Different logo, new colors—a whole new image—all for the purpose of communicating our mission more clearly.

Our materials reflect this new look. The next step in that process is coming soon—we are currently in the process of developing a brand new web site!

Our new site will be rich with stories, pictures, and videos that represent our work. When you enter the new web site, you will be able to see a fresh design that will make it easier for our members—and potential members—to learn about our history of legislative achievements, as well as our current projects. And, importantly, it will be easier to get involved and stay engaged. So, visit us soon at [www.mainewomen.org](http://www.mainewomen.org) to see how we've changed!

# Meet the Women

of the Maine Women's Lobby and the Maine Women's Policy Center

## BOARD MEMBER ANNA MELBIN



The Maine Women's Lobby's Vice-Chair, Anna Melbin, has an easy smile and sense of humor which belies her intense work ethic and passion for equality and justice. Anna serves as Technical Assistant Specialist for the National Network to End Domestic Violence Fund, a job which takes her across the country, working with more than 200 organizations which provide transitional housing services to survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking.

Says Anna of her work of three and a half years, "It has always been a passion of mine to help programs develop services that are responses to real needs. The larger issue for me is that housing is a human right – not a privilege. I believe that everyone deserves to have safe, affordable, adequate housing."

Anna brings not only passion but expertise in program management to her work with the Maine Women's Lobby and Maine Women's Policy Center. "I moved to Maine about five and a half years ago, and a friend of mine was involved with the Lobby; she was on the Board, and she invited me to submit an interest in being included on the Board. It really felt like a fit for me and a great opportunity for me to get involved in the issues in the state. It has proved to be that and so much more."

When asked what drives her interest in the work, Anna cites her passion for wanting equality for all people and to have access to basic services and rights like health care, housing, and clean air to breathe. She says, "On a more concrete level, I just think the world has a lot of work to do. We don't do a good job taking care of the people who need the most help." Adding, "The basic right to choose what happens with your own body is central to me."

"As someone who has spent the last 15-20 years volunteering and working for nonprofits, I don't think I have been involved with an organization that is as efficient and cost effective as these two." Remarking on the staff and Board, Anna says, "There is a commitment that is kind of easy and lovely to be involved in, and inspirational. Because people work so hard for the organization, you want to be involved in that, and you want to work hard too."

Anna knows something about working hard. When not on the road, she works from her home in Yarmouth where she lives with her husband, Nath, and their pets.

# Maine Women's Lobby Agenda for the 124th Legislative Session

## Creating Economic Security & Opportunity

The Maine Women's Lobby will help women support themselves and their families by:

- Guaranteeing paid sick days so that everyone has the opportunity to get well
- Extending protections against discrimination to parents and all caregivers
- Defending basic support services such as TANF, Medicaid, and General Assistance
- Working to narrow the wage gap
- Raising the minimum wage and reducing Maine's tip credit to more fairly compensate restaurant workers and others in Maine's service industries.

## Protecting Women from Violence

The Maine Women's Lobby will support survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault by:

- Extending the protection of paid sick days to cover time off for survivors to get to safety, find medical care, or seek legal protection
- Ensuring adequate funding for critical violence prevention services, including sexual assault and domestic violence prevention and intervention.

## Ensuring Access to Health Care

The Maine Women's Lobby will affirm Maine women's fundamental right to privacy and will expand access to affordable, quality health care by:

- Defending against restrictions on abortion, family planning, and comprehensive sexuality education
- Upholding Maine's 35-year-old law which protects minors' confidentiality when seeking contraceptive services
- Preserving access to health care through MaineCare and Dirigo Health Plan.

## Ending Discrimination

The Maine Women's Lobby will ensure civil rights for gays and lesbians by:

- Guaranteeing equal protection by amending Maine law to allow same-sex couples the legal right to civil marriage
- Opposing attacks on the rights of all Maine people.

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## Show Off Your Support with a Maine Women's Lobby T-shirt!

Through the generous support of Shipyard Brewing Company, we have limited edition Maine Women's Lobby "Cheers to 30 Years" t-shirts. These t-shirts make great gifts - while supporting a great cause.

By sporting your Maine Women's Lobby t-shirt, you can publicly celebrate our work for social justice and help us to promote economic security, safeguard civil rights, ensure freedom from violence, and champion reproductive health care for Maine women and girls.

Shirts come in two styles: traditional and fitted (the picture to the right shows the fitted style). The t-shirts are \$20 each, including shipping (sizes 2X & 3X are \$25).

Visit us at [www.mainewomen.org](http://www.mainewomen.org) for the t-shirt specs and to purchase online. We can also process your order over the phone; give us a call at 207.622.0851.





# Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

*We gratefully acknowledge the supporters of our 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration.*

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*We have made every effort to ensure the accuracy of this list, and we sincerely apologize for any errors or omissions.*

# MAINE WOMEN'S LOBBY FOUNDER BECOMES FIRST WOMAN ATTORNEY GENERAL

We're thrilled to congratulate the Honorable Janet T. Mills, Maine Women's Lobby co-founder, on becoming the first woman to serve as Attorney General for Maine. This latest achievement adds to her long list of honors. In addition to being the first woman in the Criminal Division of the Attorney General's office, Janet served as New England's first woman District Attorney—and one of the first in the country—on top of her years of legislative service.

As Janet stated at the swearing-in ceremony, "The road I take is one that will open opportunities for every girl growing up in this state who once had dreams but who had to put them aside. I ran for office because I believed I was the most qualified person for the job. And I hope that history proves it so. I also ran for every Maine woman and girl who grows up in the shadows of Margaret Chase Smith and who seeks opportunity in this state."

Thank you, Janet, for your continued leadership!



The Honorable Janet T. Mills, a Maine Women's Lobby founder, is sworn in as Maine's first woman Attorney General. Congratulations, Janet!

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN  
Maine Women's Lobby



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