



Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

MEDIA RELEASE

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Committee Split on Whether to Gut Child Labor Protections

Vote Comes on the 100th Anniversary of Teen Workplace Fire

Augusta – Today lawmakers in the Labor, Commerce, Research and Economic Development Committee split 6-6 on whether to roll back child labor protections. One committee member was absent. The latest amendment to L.D. 516 would permit employers to schedule teen workers up to 24 hours during the school week, up to six hours on a school day and keep them working until 11 o'clock on a school night.

“The Maine Women’s Lobby applauds the six committee members who voted to uphold Maine’s longstanding commitment to the health and welfare of teens in the workforce,” said Laura Harper, Director of Public Policy. “Students need a solid high school education to compete in a challenging economy and pave the way for future success. Governor LePage has said that boosting k-12 performance is a top economic priority. Why, then is he promoting a roll back of the most fundamental child labor protections that ensure kids can succeed in school?”

Harper continues, “It’s difficult not to view this as simply a short-sighted effort by Maine’s hospitality industry to employ more of Maine’s teens for longer hours, later at night during the school year. No evidence presented suggests that there is an unskilled labor shortage in our state and volumes of research prove that students have the greatest success in the present and the long-term when their hours at work are limited during the school year.”

Maine’s child labor laws were first enacted in 1847, and strengthened repeatedly over the years. The reason? Educators complained that students forced to work long hours outside of school were falling asleep in class. The current law limiting working hours for 16 and 17 year-olds was forged through bipartisan agreement in the legislature about the need to balance employer interests with the health and welfare of Maine children. Indeed, according to the Legislative Record, in debate on the Senate floor, the original law was referred to as the “Put Learning First, Put Working Second” bill.

Mainers have rightly raised their voices over the past two days over the prospective removal of a mural depicting Maine's labor history — including Maine's history of child labor.

Today, many throughout Maine are commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire – a horrendous fire in which 146 people, many of them teen girls, were burned or jumped to their deaths because of inadequate labor protections.

Now it's time they raised their voices and urged their legislators not to roll back Maine's child labor law.

Maine Women's Lobby is a nonpartisan, nonprofit, membership organization working since 1978 to increase opportunities for women and girls through advocacy and legislative action.

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