

COALITION

FOR MAINE WOMEN

Equal Pay Day 2011: 4 Recommendations for Action

THE COALITION FOR MAINE WOMEN is an alliance of more than thirty non-profit organizations in Maine working together to promote and defend women's interests by working at the State House and at the grassroots level. Our mission is to collaborate and coordinate efforts to improve the social, economic, and political status of women and to ensure the equality of all Maine citizens.

The recent White House report, "**Women in America: Indicators of Social and Economic Well-Being**" addresses women's present role in family life, education, employment, health, and crime in American society. A new five-year data report, "**Working Women in Maine: Indicators for Progress**," published by the Women's Employment Issues Committee of the Maine Jobs Council, tracks progress towards attaining economic security for women in Maine.

Together these reports challenge policymakers, researchers, and advocates to do more to further policy solutions to improve the economic security and opportunity of women and the families they support. They note that women's gains in education and increased participation in the labor force have not yet translated into wage and income equity. At all levels of education, women continue to earn less than their male counterparts. Women are more likely to live in poverty than men, and the economic inequities for women of color and older women are even greater.

Both in Congress and in the Maine Legislature, policymakers have an opportunity to translate these findings into real policy solutions. On Equal Pay Day April 12, 2011—the national date that symbolizes how far into 2011 women must work to earn what men earned in 2010—the Coalition for Maine Women issues the following recommendations. Together we can make progress for women and all Maine people, for when women are economically secure their families, their communities, and the state as a whole benefit.

Recommendation #1: Pass the Paycheck Fairness Act

The gender wage gap depresses women's earnings at a time when women are the sole breadwinners, or co-breadwinners in 2 out of 3 households. In 2008, a woman working full-time, year round in Maine earned \$.80 to a man's dollar. In 2009, the gap widened to \$.76. Far more than a measure of equity, the gender wage disparity robs households of hundreds of thousands of dollars over the course of a working life, and reduces women's retirement earnings. According to Mellon Financial Corporation estimate cited in the Maine Economic Growth Council *Measures of Growth* report, a typical female college graduate in 2000 would earn \$520,000 less over her lifetime due to the gender wage gap. The Paycheck Fairness Act would address this longstanding inequity by closing loopholes in the almost 50-year-old Equal Pay Act, and bring the statute's remedies in line with other civil rights laws. This bill passed the U.S. House of Representatives in the 111th Congress with the support of Congressman Michael Michaud and Congresswomen Chellie Pingree, but failed along procedural lines in the Senate. ***The Paycheck Fairness Act should be a priority for passage in the 112th Congress.***

Recommendation #2: Maintain Critical Health Coverage for Women

Despite falling rates of employer-based coverage, Maine has made considerable progress in increasing health insurance coverage. Maine ranks fifth in its health coverage rate for women. In fact, 72% of

Maine women are covered by private, employer-sponsored or public health insurance. Unfortunately, under Governor LePage's proposed budget for 2012-2013, thousands of Maine parents would begin to lose this coverage. His proposal reduces eligibility for MaineCare for parents from 133% to 200% of the federal poverty level. No new families within these income levels would be able to enroll and 14,000 parents would be faced with permanent loss of their MaineCare coverage if their income goes up—even temporarily. The cost to the state of this coverage, per person, is small. But for many parents the result of loss of coverage will be that they will go to a hospital emergency room—for much more costly care. Further, the Governor's budget cuts threaten the elderly and disabled by reducing eligibility for the Medicare Savings Program. If adopted, this will result in more than 40,000 seniors and people with disabilities losing some or all help with their prescription drug costs. ***The Maine Legislature should oppose these short-sighted cuts to Maine's MaineCare program.***

Recommendation #3: Reject Punitive Cuts to the TANF Program

Nearly one out of three single-female headed households in Maine continues to earn below the federal poverty level. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) provides assistance to 14,000 households, including 25,000 Maine children. Unfortunately, rather than providing a pathway out of poverty, two elements of Governor LePage's proposed budget would hamper women's ability to meet their family's basic needs. One proposal would extend sanctions to entire families, including children, if a parent is unable to meet TANF/ASPIRE requirements, meaning that families in these circumstances would go without any income at all. Another proposal would impose a strict, five-year time limit for families on TANF. Recent research from professors at the University of New England and University of Maine shows that these cuts will disproportionately punish women—who comprise 92% of TANF recipients. These women are often forced to return to TANF several times due to the challenges that come with raising young children on their own while trying to sustain low-wage employment. Moreover, currently nearly 90% of families on TANF for longer than 60 months have a family member with a disability. Cutting benefits without providing adequate supports for those with work-limiting disabilities will not provide a pathway out of poverty for families. ***Maine lawmakers should reject strict lifetime limits and full-family sanctions for TANF families.***

Recommendation #4: Increase Access to Non-Traditional Occupations and STEM Careers

In 2008, a greater percentage of women than men had attained some college education. This is good news because the gender wage gap narrows with higher educational attainment. Unfortunately, women's earnings by occupational group suggest that we can do more to increase women's access to higher-paying occupations. One pathway to training in non-traditional occupations and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) field for women is apprenticeship. Fortunately, LD 1432, *An Act to Expand Apprenticeship Programs and Scholarship Programs with Funding from Identification of Ineffective Economic Development Tax Incentives* offers an economic development strategy that would increase education and training opportunities for Maine workers. The bill would establish and implement a program to promote apprenticeships in high wage, high demand occupations. It would improve access for women, minorities, and people with low incomes; and provide a more efficient method for Maine employers and workers to use apprenticeship as a talent development strategy customized to meet their needs. ***Maine lawmakers should endorse legislation to increase access to apprenticeship.***

The Coalition for Maine Women steering committee

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