

Local School Committee Decision Launches National Debate

Action Needed to Call for Support, Dialogue about the Health Needs of Students

At the time of this writing, a bevy of TV cameras were still perched outside of King Middle School in Portland, providing continuing coverage of a local school committee decision which launched a statewide - even national - discussion about reproductive health care and young women.

In October, Portland's School Committee voted to approve a measure allowing King Middle School students to receive prescriptions for birth control medications. The health center at King Middle School is a joint project of Portland Public Health and the Barbara Bush Children's Hospital at Maine Medical Center. This health center provides a variety of services to students, including immunizations and check-ups, sexually transmitted infection testing and treatment, and has been making condoms available. Providing birth control prescriptions to students is now another service at the health center.

We all believe that parents should be the primary educators about health and sexuality in their children's lives. And the good news is that three in five students do talk with their parents about their sexual health and birth control. Certainly, no parent wants to think their middle schooler needs birth control, but the reality is that not all kids have a great relationship with their parents, and those kids need to be able to turn to a trusted source like a school health center for information and services.

The Maine Women's Lobby supports King Middle School's recognition that it is important to provide students with the information and resources they need to make healthy decisions.

Although the media debate about this issue threatens to swamp real dialogue about the needs of students, it has, in fact, launched an important conversation about the realities of teens' lives. It's also helped promote conversation about Maine's successful measures - such as comprehensive family life education - which help Maine have the lowest pregnancy rate for girls under the age of 14 in the nation. You can help foster positive dialogue by writing a letter to the editor of the *Portland Press Herald*. Contact us for help or talking points at info@mainewomen.org.

The Maine Women's

FALL 2007

ADVOCATE

A publication of the Maine Women's Lobby & Maine Women's Policy Center



Legislative Outlook

Busy 'Short Session' Ahead for the Lobby

In the final months before the start of the second regular session of the 123rd Legislature, the Maine Women's Lobby is advocating for bills that have been carried over until January, while monitoring more than 500 new initiatives.

The Maine Women's Lobby will be working on *An Act to Ensure Fair Wages* (L.D. 1697) which seeks to increase the minimum wage and alter the tip credit formula for service workers. We will promote *An Act to Create the Maine Council on Poverty and Economic Security* (L.D. 1110) as well as *An Act to Amend the Laws Governing Stalking* (L.D. 1873) which will update and strengthen Maine's current laws against stalking.

Throughout the fall, **Maine Women's Lobby Director of Public Policy, Laura Harper**, has been tracking the Commission to Develop a Strategic Priorities Plan for Maine's Young Children and will be eagerly awaiting their recommendations to the Legislature on increasing access to quality early childhood education.

Maine Women's Lobby Executive Director, Sarah Standiford, has been serving on the Commission to Develop Strategies to Increase Postsecondary Access, Retention, and Completion for Low-wage, Low-skilled Adults, established by the Legislature this spring. The Commission has proposed solutions for reducing barriers to degree attainment for adult students and will make a report to the Legislature in early December. We're hopeful that legislation establishing new pathways to higher education for adult workers will result.

Most importantly, all Maine Women's Lobby staff have been working to educate the public about the paid sick day bill, *An Act to Care for Working Families* (L.D. 1454). After months of phone banking, in-district meetings, and petition signature collecting, we're gearing up for a dynamic debate during the second legislative session. For more information about our legislative priorities, contact Laura Harper at (207) 622-0851, ext. 21 or lharper@mainewomen.org.

Breakfast of Champions Draws Crowd

Annual Event Series Spotlights New Policies to Promote Work and Family

The Maine Women's Policy Center's annual event series brought hundreds of people together in Portland, Bangor, and Presque Isle. This year's event was a call to action for policies that will help families balance work and family caregiving responsibilities.



Judith Stadman Tucker addresses the crowd

"Most of us will care for children, parents, elderly relatives, or a loved one during our lives - and most of us will require care. But doing so can put our career advancement, wage level, and even our job security at risk," said **Kimm Collins, Chair of the Maine Women's Policy Center**

Board of Directors. "The good news is there are practical solutions available right now to support the well-being of our families, businesses, and communities."

"Today, the terrible work/family dilemmas facing many working families have created a deep divide between the realities of the workplace and our values regarding basic fairness," said keynote speaker, **Judith Stadman Tucker, editor of Mothers Movement Online.** "Government action is required." She pointed to a new report outlining policy strategies for creating flexibility at work and named legislation establishing family leave insurance, paid sick days, and permitting workers the right to formally request flexible work schedules as opportunities on the horizon.

The **Family Violence Project** was honored with the Maine Women's Policy Center **Action Award** for their smart business practices including flexible scheduling, paid leave, and an infant-friendly workplace. This year's event was made possible through the support of dozens of sponsors including lead contributors **AARP; Maine Street Solutions LLC; MaineHousing; U.S. Department of Labor, Women's Bureau; and Verrill Dana LLP.**

Maine Women's Lobby

PO Box 15
Hallowell, ME 04347
207-622-0851
www.mainewomen.org



2008 Legislative
Outlook Inside!

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 77
Augusta, ME

Children's Health the Focus of Paid Sick Days Media Event

Educators Join with Maine Women's Lobby to Demand Paid Sick Days

On September 25, school administrators, educators, nurses, and children gathered in front of Longfellow School in Portland to demand policies that will enable parents to stay home from work to care for sick children. The Maine Women's Lobby called for legislation requiring paid sick days and unveiled a new

statewide poll demonstrating broad, bipartisan support for the initiative.

"Parents without paid sick days are more likely to have to postpone or skip childcare visits recommended by their physicians and often have to interrupt vaccination series or other necessary treatment, making them more vulnerable to preventable serious illnesses," said **Amanda Rowe**, school nurse coordinator from Portland. "This is a public health problem for our schools and our communities."

When children get sick, they recover faster when cared for by their parents; yet, too often, parents can't take time off from work because they do not have access to paid sick days. Nearly one out of two full-time Maine workers lack a single paid sick day.

Advocates announced the results of a new statewide opinion poll which demonstrate broad, bipartisan support for legislation requiring paid sick days. The poll, conducted by Lake Research Partners of 500 likely Maine voters, finds that nearly nine out of ten poll respondents (87%) support providing all workers a minimum number of paid sick days to care for themselves or immediate family members. There is strong bipartisan agreement, with 88% of Democrats, 87% of Independents, and 79% of Republicans expressing support. "When you work hard in Maine, you should be able to care of yourself and your family when illness strikes – and as our poll results show, the vast majority of Maine people agree," said **Laura Harper, Director of Public Policy for the Maine Women's Lobby**. "Paid sick days will go a long way towards ensuring that every worker can be sick without fear of losing pay or even losing a job. It's time to care for our families and communities."



Flanked by students and school officials, Director of Public Policy, Laura Harper, calls for paid sick days at a media event in front of Longfellow School

From the Executive Director

Out and About: Trainings and Outreach Take Staff Across the State, Across the Country

You might not know that Maine Women's Policy Center staff are busy year-round, conducting outreach on our policy agenda and providing support to women's groups who want to get involved in the political process. It's part of our mission to develop leadership and promote public policy, and it takes us to extraordinary places! Here's a snapshot of this season's travels:

Cara Bilodeau, Public Relations and Community Organizer, spent a September weekend at the **Common Ground Country Fair** in Unity, Maine, guiding volunteers in collecting postcards in support of paid sick days legislation and recruiting activists for the future. Said Cara, "Over the course of the weekend, volunteers collected 300 postcards from people all across the state." Cara also spent time this season teaching university classes and advocacy workshops, while **Director of Public Policy, Laura Harper**, made many



Folks at the Common Ground Country Fair take a moment to sign paid sick days petitions



Laura Harper (front left) enjoys a moment in the Senate Chamber with visiting business women from Southeast Asia

new friends during a recent presentation to a business women's delegation from Southeast Asia hosted by the **World Affairs Council of Maine**. "After a discussion on women's leadership, I took them on an hour-long tour of the State House, including an impromptu meeting with the Governor," said Laura, hoping to follow up on an invitation to visit one delegate in Nepal.

During the month of November, you can catch Laura, Cara, and I teaching at schools and conferences from Biddeford to Bar Harbor. Meanwhile, **Development and Administrative Manager, Bonnie Buckmore**, will be traveling to Charleston, South Carolina, for an immersion training in our new database system, and I'll be participating in a panel discussion on work and family issues at a forum for journalists at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. Here's hoping for some rest over the holidays and before intensive activities start up again! Thanks for your support in making our work possible.

- Sarah Standiford, Executive Director

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

Kimm A. Collins, MSW - Board Chair, Maine Women's Policy Center and Maine Women's Lobby; Founder, Insight Training and Consultation Service; and Community Faculty, University of New England School of Social Work.

How did you become involved with the Lobby?

Beginning over a decade ago, I had the opportunity to work in coalition with Maine Women's Lobby former **Executive Director, Laura Fortman**. Inspired by Laura and the work she was doing at the State House, I began volunteering to serve on the Maine Women's Lobby Legislative Committee. It's been a pleasure to remain engaged in the work ever since and an honor to now serve as Chair of the organizations. It's such a privilege to serve beside visionary leaders in the progressive community!

What inspires you to serve?

In a word – gratitude. It's a chance to give back to the community and to honor my mom's memory by living the values she nurtured in me. Both throughout her life, and in her death, she taught me that it's a privilege to be here.

She nurtured a passion for social justice. She nurtured a belief in possibilities for social change. She demonstrated resiliency and the strength of the human spirit, and she was really all about 'doing the right thing' – valuing fairness – treating all people with dignity and respect. Her life ended sooner than it should have, so the calling to turn values into action beckons ever stronger as a way for her values to live on.

Tell me about other hobbies or interests.

Another life lesson – play as hard as you work! My partner, Jen, and I enjoy kayaking, cycling, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, climbing The Precipice, and hiking – especially in Acadia. I also enjoy creating Zen-inspired meditation gardens and stained-glass, woodworking, culinary escapades with close friends, and promoting social change!

What would you say to people wanting to get involved with the Maine Women's Lobby for the first time?

Welcome. Absolutely, let's make change happen together!



Kimm A. Collins, Board Chair of the Maine Women's Lobby and Policy Center

2007 Membership Campaign

It's Time to Renew Your Membership!

As longtime Lobby members know, it's your membership contribution to the Maine Women's Lobby which allows us to conduct direct and grassroots advocacy on behalf of women at the State House. Your non tax-deductible contribution ensures we have a lobbyist on the ground, in Augusta, as we have since 1979. In sum, your membership allows us to build the Maine Women's Lobby - *the largest and strongest organization of its kind in the country.*

Members provide grassroots support to our work and allow us to speak powerfully on their behalf. Your comments and support provide us with the information we need to frame a relevant legislative agenda. So, if you have already made your membership contribution, *thank you!* If not, please do so today.

You can renew by making a secure online donation at www.mainewomen.org or call (207) 622-0851. It makes our work possible. Thank you!

Maine Women's Lobby Bids Farewell to Cara Bilodeau

In November, the Maine Women's Lobby will say good-bye to **Cara Bilodeau**, our Public Relations and Community Organizer of nearly three years, as she resettles in Seattle. Cara's presence at the Maine Women's Lobby and Maine Women's Policy Center launched our major grassroots organizing program with our campaign to protect the independence of the federal court system. Whether it was by organizing town hall meetings or driving across the State as part of the "Rolling Justice" tour, Cara mobilized thousands of people to take action.

Always nimble, Cara redirected her efforts towards successfully defeating TABOR last year and developed our campaign for paid sick days. During her tenure, she built a grassroots lobby of over 2,500 activists and developed new tools to keep people informed and motivated. We're sad to see her leave but know that she will do great work in her new role as Organizer with Stand for Children. *Thank you, Cara!* The Maine Women's Lobby will soon be hiring. For a copy of the job description, please e-mail info@mainewomen.org or call (207) 622-0851.



(left to right) Laura, Cara, and Bonnie enjoy a scenic moment en route to Presque Isle