

Divorce and Loss of Health Care

Share Your Story!

As part of the Divorce Health Access Project, the Maine Women's Policy Center is working to minimize the disruption of health care coverage for women undergoing divorce or separation, and we want to talk with people affected by the loss of health insurance as a result of divorce.

- ◆ Have you been faced with loss of health insurance as a result of divorce?
- ◆ Have separation or divorce proceedings put your health insurance coverage at risk?
- ◆ Are you an attorney or mediator who has counseled women at risk of losing insurance?

If so, **we want to hear from you.** If you or someone you know has a story to share about losing health insurance as a result of divorce or separation, please contact the Maine Women's Policy Center at 207-622-0851 or info@mainewomen.org. We'll follow up with you to ask a few questions and compile your experience alongside the stories of others. Your experience can help craft a solution that works in the best interests of families!

SAVE THE DATES

2006 Breakfast of Champions

October 5, 2006, Holiday Inn By the Bay, Portland
October 11, 2006, Spectacular Event Center, Bangor
October 12, 2006, Northern Maine Community College, Presque Isle

7:30-9:00 a.m.

Featuring a gubernatorial candidates forum

Advance tickets are \$35, \$40 at the door,
student/low-income tickets are \$15.
Event sponsorship levels begin at \$150.

For sponsorship information, call 207-622-0851 or e-mail
Bonnie Buckmore at development@mainewomen.org.

We are pleased to be presenting our 2nd annual **Action Award**, recognizing a business practice or set of policies that serve to advance women in the workplace and demonstrates a commitment to women workers. To nominate a business, go to <http://www.mainewomen.org/homeMWPC.htm> or contact us at 207-622-0851 or info@mainewomen.org. The **deadline for nominations is July 30, 2006.**

The Maine Women's

SUMMER 2006

ADVOCATE

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NRA Highjacking of Domestic Violence Bill and Minimum Wage Increase Dominate End of Session

News from Under the Dome

A bill to protect victims of domestic violence (L.D.1938), first defeated in a last-minute bid by the National Rifle Association (NRA) to protect firearms over women's lives, ultimately won approval when reintroduced as L.D. 2116 in the last few days of the legislative session.

The original bill, supported as a top priority by the Maine Women's Lobby, enabled victims to be notified if someone named in a protection from abuse order (PFA) attempted to illegally purchase a firearm so that they could take safety precautions. While the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee voted unanimously in favor of the bill and there was not one single opponent during the public hearing, the bill was derailed when it hit the floor of the House. After the bill passed under the hammer in the Senate, it was tabled by Representative Joshua Tardy in order to attach an amendment pushed by the NRA to protect firearms from being damaged when confiscated by law enforcement. Ultimately, the Senate remained committed to the original bill, but the House would not pass it without amendments, so the bill failed.

We were deeply disappointed in the NRA's attempt to tack on an irrelevant and unnecessary amendment - a tactic seemingly being used throughout the country. It would have weakened a bill whose sole intent was to notify victims and law enforcement about attempted handgun purchases by individuals who are prohibited from doing so because of their history of abuse. Fortunately, when an amendment was reintroduced as a second bill, the violence prevention legislation passed unanimously.

Not all of our priority bills met with that much drama, however. In April, Governor Baldacci signed into law an increase in the minimum wage (L.D. 235) which will begin to help struggling families make ends meet by raising the minimum wage from \$6.50 to \$6.75 on October 1, 2006 and then to \$7.00 beginning October 1, 2007.

Access to health care continued to be a priority for the 122nd Legislature. Two bills were at the heart of the debate towards the end of the session. The first empowered the Dirigo Health Agency to self-administer (L.D. 1845). The other bill (L.D. 1935) prohibited insurance companies from passing on to consumers the cost savings realized from the Dirigo Health Program (assessed by the Superintendent of Insurance to be \$42 million in the first year). Both bills were rejected by the Legislature. This means that enrollment in Dirigo Health will continue to be available in 2006-2007, but more work is needed to provide the agency with the tool to gain efficiencies.

Another important success was passage of a bill increasing the availability of emergency alternative aid for low-income families (L.D. 1854). This law will help more low-income families stay off public assistance by providing support in cases of financial crisis such as a car repair or urgent housing needs.

In 2005, the Maine Legislature helped protect seniors and people with disabilities by authorizing "wrap around" funds during implementation of the federal Medicare Drug Benefit. We supported the budget (L.D. 1968) which provided \$20 million in state funding for two years to pay for the gap in coverage for some recipients of the Drugs for the Elderly program. As a result, our seniors will be able to get the prescription drugs they need to survive and lead longer, healthier lives.

-Lauralee Raymond

Maine Women's Lobby Director of Public Affairs, Lauralee Raymond, tracked dozens of other bills with some positive and negative outcomes. For a complete wrap-up and to see how your legislators voted, check out the insert in this newsletter! To find out who represents you at the State House, go to http://www.maine.gov/portal/government/edemocracy/lookup_officials.php or call us at 207-622-0851.

Maine Women's Lobby

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Legislative Report
Inside!

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TABOR Spells Trouble for Maine Services, Way of Life

From the Executive Director

It's summertime, and that means the Legislature has wound down... and another campaign season is upon us! Once again, in addition to our ongoing work to engage women in the electoral process, we're taking the summer to educate our members and supporters about a critical referendum measure.

This year, unfortunately, we are faced with the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights (TABOR), a punitive measure designed to shrink government by restricting growth - at every level - to a formula of population growth plus inflation.

The Maine Women's Lobby agrees that tax reform is long overdue. The trouble is, TABOR will make things worse by taking away the ability of state and local governments to make appropriate budget decisions, while wiping away local services that Maine people depend on like education, health care, and police and fire protection. Colorado is the only other state to enact TABOR, and just last year Colorado citizens voted to suspend the law because of the harmful impact it has had on their local services.

Why is the Maine Women's Lobby involved? Simply put, women are ground zero for tax and spending decisions. We benefit disproportionately from such services as higher education (women need to earn a Bachelor's degree in order to make the same salary, on average, that a man with a high school diploma earns), MaineCare, and other public health programs. This is why it's of the utmost importance that women's voices are part of the debate.

Don't be surprised to see us pounding the pavement once again this summer, talking with friends and neighbors about the importance of voting. You may also expect a phone call or two as the elections get closer, reminding you to make your voice heard at the polls. And on November 7, we urge you to Vote "No" on TABOR. Thanks for your support.

Sarah Standiford, Executive Director



At a news conference in March, advocates denounce the impact TABOR would have on Maine children and families.

Meet the Women of the Maine Women's Lobby and Policy Center Barbara A. Alexander, Vice-Chair MWL Board Consumer Affairs Consultant

How did you become involved with the organizations? In the very beginning when Janet Mills and Linda Smith Dyer put this together, I was serving as head of the consumer credit protection office in Maine government. I had been appointed to that office with the beginning of Governor Joseph Brennan's Administration. This was 1979. There were many of us in positions that had never before been filled by women. When the Maine Women's Lobby was first formed, those involved were activist women in government, we all knew each other. It was a pretty small group, so we helped form the first board.



Barbara with grandson Tyler

What would you say inspires you to serve? I served on the initial board for 3 or 4 years. I then left the board and went on with my life. I was very involved with my family. I have two children, Phillip was still a toddler and my second child Katherine was born in 1984, all this while working full-time in a professional capacity. I was director of the Consumer Assistance Division at the Public Utilities Commission from 1986-1996. I would support the Lobby financially but was not involved in an ongoing way. When I opened my own consulting business in 1996, I could devote some time and felt that it was important to get involved again. Besides, I knew how to do public policy work at that point, having done it my whole professional life. I've tried to get prior board members back into the Lobby. Also, the Linda Smith Dyer Fellowship became a pretty all-consuming project for me. After Linda died, we set up a program to provide a fellowship in Linda's name for a law student to work on policy with the Maine Women's Policy Center.

What is unique about the Maine Women's Lobby? Even in Maine, the Lobby is one of the few if not the only organization whose sole purpose is to focus on public policy matters that affect Maine women and girls in the broadest sense of the word and to staff a full-time lobbyist oriented towards public policy at the State House.

What would you say to someone wanting to get involved for the first time? Whether it be a vote we manage to swing our way or a project completed, we get things done in a way that makes you feel part of a bigger purpose in life. Very important!

- Sarah Standiford

Girls' Day Enlightens, Inspires Legislators and Supporters Join with Girls in Making 10th Annual Girls' Day a Success

What a wonderful sight - 100 8th grade girls arrived in Augusta on March 23 for the Maine Women's Policy Center's 10th Annual Girls' Day at the State House. Participants from Princeton to Portland gathered for a day of learning, leadership, and exploration of state government.

Through a mock public hearing and press conference exercise, students debated an actual bill to lower the minimum age of service in the House of Representatives from 21 to 18. About one third of the girls had the opportunity to page in the House and the Senate.

Other Girls' Day highlights included meeting Governor Baldacci, job shadowing legislators, and, for the first time, hearing inspirational personal stories from elected and appointed women leaders. As one student wrote: "I learned that even a person like me could have a voice in the State House. Before I wasn't interested in being a politician, but now I'm really considering it."

Another wrote: "I learned that women can do everything men can do and to do what your heart tells you to do."



The mock press conference exercise engages girls in discussion while a camerawoman from Channel 5 films the event.

A big thank you goes to the more than 50 volunteers who donated their time and talents, as well as the numerous sponsors who contributed financially. This winning combination is what has made Girls' Day a success for the past decade.

- Bonnie Buckmore

We'd Like To Thank the Sponsors of Girls' Day at the State House

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