

May 20, 2021

Dear Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has advocated for public policy which increases the health, wellness, safety, and economic security of Maine women and girls, with a focus on the most marginalized populations and communities.

We write today **in support of LD 296, "An Act To Provide a Tax Credit for Family Caregivers."** We thank Representative Cloutier for sponsoring this bill.

Family caregivers are overwhelmingly female-identified – approximately 60 to 87 percent of family caregivers are women.<sup>1</sup> Caregiving has real economic implications on the lives of women who support their families in this way: the total individual lost wages for a woman who leaves the labor force early because of caregiving responsibilities equals \$142,693. When the loss of Social Security benefits is factored in (estimated at approximately \$131,351), along with lost pensions (approximately \$50,000), **an individual female caregiver can experience an economic loss of around \$324,000.**<sup>2</sup> This contributes to a significant gender gap in retirement: older women living alone have a median income of only 81 percent of older men living alone in Maine,<sup>3</sup> and the median income of the average older woman - \$22,059 – is not enough to meet basic needs.<sup>4</sup>

Maine relies on a network of family caregivers to support our communities. **In 2019 family caregivers provided \$2.2 billion worth of care.**<sup>5</sup> As Maine's population ages we will be depending on this system more than ever, but family caregivers need more support to do this work sustainably. Compared to the value that family caregivers bring to our state, a tax credit is a comparably small investment in a critical piece of our health infrastructure.

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<sup>1</sup> Morhardt, D. (unk). Gender differences in family caregiving. Northwestern University. Retrieved from: <https://www.caregiving.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/9NAC-Morhardt.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> MetLife Mature Market Institute. (2011). The MetLife study of caregiving costs to working caregivers. Retrieved from <https://www.caregiving.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/mmi-caregiving-costs-working-caregivers.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> \$22,059 for women versus \$27,008 for men - Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> The 'Elder Economic Security Index' shows that an older person in 'poor health' living in Maine, who owns their own home with no mortgage needs \$24,492 each year to meet their basic living needs. [www.elderindex.org](http://www.elderindex.org).

<sup>5</sup> <sup>1</sup> *AARP Public Policy Institute, Reinhard, S. C. R., Feinberg, L. F. F., Houser, A. H., Choula, R. C., & Evans, M. E. (2019, November). Valuing the Invaluable: 2019 Update Charting a Path Forward.* <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/ppi/2019/11/valuing-the-invaluable-2019-update-charting-a-path-forward.doi.10.26419-2Fppi.00082.001.pdf>



Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

The burden of family caregiving has more than simply an economic impact. Studies show that female caregivers have greater interference and limitations in their work and social life due to caregiving, and that **the disproportionate burden of caregiving leads to greater health problems, less positive outlook on life, and greater need for external supports.**<sup>6</sup> There are real emotional and financial costs associated with these outcomes.

In some families, family-based care may be a choice to ensure family support and connection, but in many circumstances, family-based care may be literally the only option available to them, due to financial or other barriers. When financial need requires family caregiving, and the family caregiving itself extracts an added financial burden, this means that some families face a Hobson's choice – one poor option, or nothing at all.

Maine can do better. **LD 296 offers a modest but important support for these families, carefully tailored to those with the greatest need.** Please join me in supporting this reasonable solution to a critical problem.

**We hope you will vote 'ought to pass' on LD 296.**

Sincerely,

Destie Hohman Sprague, Executive Director  
Maine Women's Lobby / mainewomen.org

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<sup>6</sup> Morhardt, D. (unk). Gender differences in family caregiving. Northwestern University. Retrieved from: <https://www.caregiving.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/9NAC-Morhardt.pdf>