



February 21, 2023

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and the Joint 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 gender-responsive and gender-equitable public policies, with a focus on those most affected by misogyny, sexism, and other forms of oppression. We support systems and proposals which increase the health, wellness, safety, and economic security of all people in Maine. We are before you today **Neither For Nor Against LD 258, An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations.**

Women's jobs represent 75 percent of pandemic related job losses¹. Women's participation in the workforce is at its lowest point in over 30 years.²

Women make up over 60 percent of Maine's unpaid caregivers³.

Finally, Maine women are far more likely than men to cite childcare or other family or personal obligations as the reason for working part-time – in fact, too few men cited childcare concerns as their reason for working part time to show a statistical sample.⁴

These facts are related, and they are driven by the same forces: **a systemic, generational lack of investment in care infrastructure in Maine and nationally.** We are here today specifically to help make the connections between state budget investment in childcare – but also to highlight the connections between all care infrastructure, including paid family and medical leave and direct care services, and to draw the connections to the wellbeing of women, and by extension all Maine families and our economy as a whole.

In 2020, an article made its way around the country titled [“Other countries have safety nets. America has women.”](#) Women are the backbone of all unpaid caregiving in Maine – in fact, this is a primary reason they are twice as likely to live in poverty as men during their retirement years. They are also the majority of all paid caregivers⁵, including childcare providers – which are some of the most undervalued roles in our economy.⁶

¹ National Women's Law Center (2022). Women Gain 83% of Jobs While 170,000 Women Leave Labor Force in June. Retrieved from <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/June-Jobs-Day.pdf>

² National Women's Law center. (2023). Another 275,000 Women Left the Workforce in January. Retrieved from <https://nwlc.org/resource/january-jobs-day-2021/>

³ Maine CDC. (2019). Maine Caregiving Infographic. Retrieved from:

<https://www.cdc.gov/aging/data/infographic/2019/maine-caregiving.html>

⁴ Cutler Institute (2022). Economic Security of Older Women in Maine. Available at MaineWomen.org/publications

⁵ National Partnership for Women and Families. (2018). The Female Face of Family Caregiving.

<https://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/economic-justice/female-face-family-caregiving.pdf>

⁶ Council for a Strong America. (2022). Child Care Providers: The Workforce Behind the Workforce in Maine.

Retrieved from <https://www.strongnation.org/articles/1865-child-care-providers-the-workforce-behind-the-workforce-in-maine>

You've heard the phrase 'the workforce behind the workforce.' I want us to remember that this workforce is almost entirely underpaid women, and that when childcare systems fall through, it is almost entirely women who pick up the pieces by stepping out of the workforce, and often forgoing years of contributions to social security or retirement savings. The effects are even more powerful when we consider race and racism, and the effects on Black, brown, and Indigenous women.⁷

Without statewide investment, women must pay the costs, through part-time work, lower-paying jobs, and loss of retirement savings – all proven side effects of lack of our caregiving structures. Maine has made powerful strides forward in recent years to correct this oversight, but we must do more.

- **Please support increased investment in the childcare workforce.** We must fully value these educators with salary supplements to ensure the stability of childcare services; and
- **Please remember that childcare begins with paid family and medical leave.** In nearly every other country in the world, parents don't have to choose between caring for their infants and paying their bills. The bipartisan Maine Paid Family & Medical Leave Commission has unanimously supported the enactment of a program, in part because they recognize the intersection of care giving, care infrastructure, and gender equity.

Continue to make improvements on behalf of the childcare workforce beginning with increasing the allocation of the childcare educator salary supplement.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Destie Hohman Sprague, Executive Director

⁷ Boston indicators (2022). Care Work in Massachusetts: A Call for Racial and Economic Justice for a Neglected Sector. Retrieved from https://www.bostonindicators.org/reports/report-detail-pages/care_work