



April 21, 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 are here **in support of LD 499, "An Act To Eliminate the Waiting Lists for Older and Disabled Residents Who Are Eligible To Receive Home-Based Care,"** and thank Representative Craven for sponsoring this bill.

Almost everyone at some point in their lives will either need additional care or support to thrive, or a member of their family will. We, and our friends and neighbors, have differing abilities, and experience changes in our bodies. We age. Virtually everyone would agree that when that additional care is needed, home is where it should take place whenever possible. The State has also agreed, which is why the Home-Based Care program exists.

You have heard from others about the vital services that this program offers, and how Maine is struggling to ensure that care is affordable – in fact, we are in the bottom tier of affordability. I will focus my remarks on some of the unseen ways that this care, and its lack of affordability, has an impact on gender equity. There are two simple facts to help illustrate this issue:

- **Older women in Maine are more than twice as likely than older men to live alone** (the most recent data shows that 51,146 women 65 and older live alone, as compared with 23,566 men¹). Older people living alone are more likely to need home-based care services, as those are the Mainers without an additional person in the household to share in daily tasks.
- **Older women living alone have a median income of only 81 percent of older men living alone in Maine** (\$22,059 to \$27,008²). The median income of the average older woman - \$22,059 – is not enough to meet their basic needs if they are in poor health.³

Simply put, more older women in Maine live alone with fewer resources to do so.

¹ American Community Survey, 2020

² Ibid.

³ 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.



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This disparity is not disconnected from the gender- and race-based economic security gap that persists throughout a woman's lifetime. In Maine, women are more likely to live in poverty⁴, and still make between .66 and .83 cents for every \$1.00 a white man makes⁵ (Black women and women of color experience both a gender gap and a race gap).

In the case of home-based care, this disparity feels especially unnecessary. We know that people in our communities need this care, we all agree that it is both more effective and more affordable when it take place in the home. We also see that not addressing the wait list disproportionately affects women and given the significant gap in economic security between white women and women of color in Maine, it further affects Black, brown, and Indigenous women.

Addressing the wait lists for home-based care is a common-sense way to ensure that Mainers get the care they need – efficiently and affordably – and also address some of the gender and race equity issues that compound as Mainers age.

We hope you will vote **'yes' on LD 499.**

Sincerely,

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

⁴ United States Census Bureau, 2014—2018 Poverty Rate in the United States By County. (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.census.gov/library/visualizations/interactive/2014-2018-poverty-rate-by-county.html>

⁵ Lifetime Wage Gap Losses for Women Overall State Rankings: 2018. (2020, March). Retrieved August 3, 2020, from <https://nwlc-ciw49tixgw5lbab.stackpathdns.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Women-Overall-Lifetime-Losses-2020-v3-1.pdf>