



May 14, 2021

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Harnett, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Judiciary,

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 1688, "An Act To Improve Consistency within the Maine Human Rights Act."** We thank Senator Hickman for sponsoring this important bill.

Our organization was founded in 1978 by a group of Mainers who recognized that some members of our community had greater access to opportunity and justice than others, and they made a commitment to change the underlying systems and structures that uphold that inequity. Since then, as a state and nation we have made so many strides to protect more marginalized or oppressed communities and populations – but there is still more to do.

The inclusion of gender identity and family status consistently across the Maine Human Rights Act helps our state to take the next step to eradicate discrimination.

As an organization rooted in gender equity, we believe explicitly including protections for gender identity is essential, and we thank the Maine Human Rights Commission for bringing this update. We recognize that this was resolved to some extent in the 129th Legislature but believe that this offers the clarity that the statute (and Mainers reading along) need.

Turning our attention to the inclusion of the family status: **At the heart of the family status definition is the fact that families are about care, and the responsibility and opportunity to provide this most human of needs.**

- There are at least 43.5 million family caregivers in the United States, and half of them have full-time employment. Two thirds of them - 66% - are women.¹
- Half of all caregivers who leave their jobs report doing so because they lacked the flexibility they needed to provide care while working.² This is especially true for low-wage earning women- especially Black, brown, and Indigenous women- who are more

¹ National Alliance for Caregiving. (2009, November). Caregiving in the U.S. National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP Public Policy Institute Publication. Retrieved 4 November 2015, from http://www.caregiving.org/data/Caregiving_in_the_US_2009_full_report.pdf

² Matos, K. (2014). Highlights from the 2014 Older Adult Caregiver Study. Families and Work Institute Publication. Retrieved 4 November 2015, from <http://www.familiesandwork.org/downloads/2014-Older-Adult-Caregiver-Study.pdf>



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often employed in service sector and hospitality industries, where there is less flexibility and fewer protections.³

Though these circumstances themselves are not discriminatory, they are examples of the fact that caregiving in our society is stigmatized – whether of children, adult children in need of care, or of a spouse or aging parent – which creates barriers to housing and employment. This can result in lack of opportunity, lifetime loss of earning contributing to the retirement-security gap, and indeed outright discrimination. **At least one study found that mothers were 79% less likely to be recommended for hire, 100% less likely to be promoted, and offered an average of \$11,000 less in salary for the same position as similarly qualified non-mothers.**⁴

In addition to the general stigma that caregivers face, there is stigma and therefore discrimination based on the type of caregiving – whether for children or aging adults – as well as how families are formed. Earlier in the session, the Labor and Housing Committee heard moving testimony from a sitting legislator about the discrimination that she and her family faced after adopting their children. Families of all backgrounds and origins are deserving of the protection of the law. **We know that this is real discrimination that harms families and can have lifelong consequences. We also know that it overwhelmingly affects women, who are so often the caregivers who power our communities and economy.**

LD 1688 brings important protections to Mainers and their families, and **we hope you will vote 'ought to pass'.**

Sincerely,

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

³ Williams, J., & Boushey, H. (2010, January). The Three Faces of Work-Family Conflict: The Poor, the Professionals, and the Missing Middle. Center for American Progress and Center for WorkLife Law Publication. Retrieved 4 November 2015, from <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2010/01/pdf/threefaces.pdf>

⁴ A Better Balance. (2018). Family Status and Caregiver Discrimination. Retrieved from: <https://www.abetterbalance.org/resources/family-status-and-caregiver-discrimination/>