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Maine Women's Lobby

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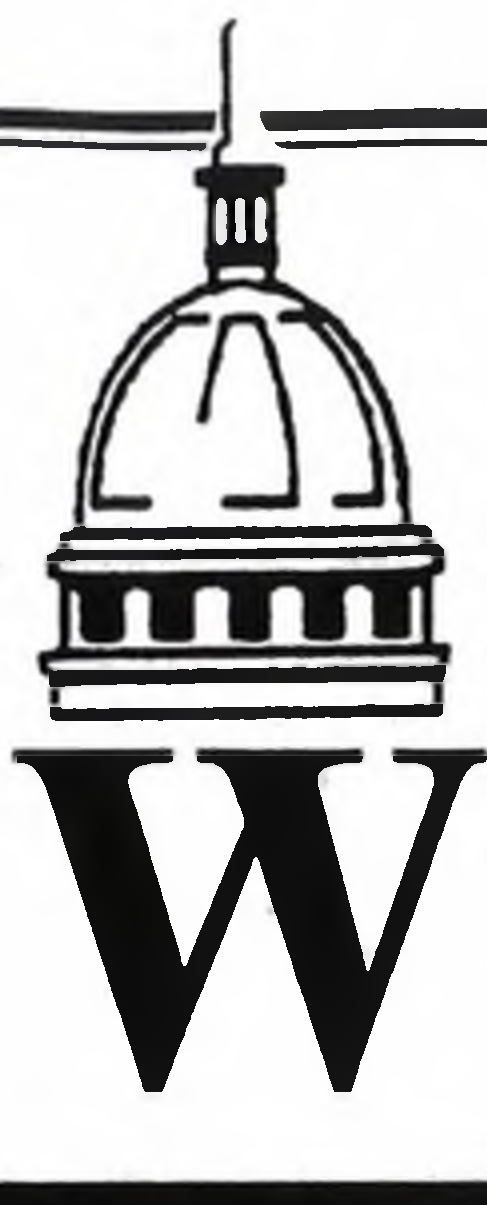
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Maine Women's Lobby

February 1994

Number 6

WELFARE REFORM:

WHY POLITICIANS FOCUS ON "WELFARE QUEENS" INSTEAD OF REFORM

by Christine Hastedt and Mary Henderson

Nothing boosts a political's applause meter these days like taking tough on welfare. Gov. John McKernan recently spoke on the need for reform that would "prevent welfare recipients from sitting home and watching soap operas while collecting government money."

The Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, politicians claim, is draining public budgets, sapping individual initiative and promoting a cultural pattern of dependency.

Poor single women with children are stereotyped as failing to work to support themselves because of some moral defect that blossoms into full-blown deviant behavior when they begin to receive AFDC.

The question facing us is not whether the welfare system should be changed - welfare recipients

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JOIN THE MARCH 8 HEALTH EQUITY CAMPAIGN IN AUGUSTA

FIGHT FOR EQUAL HEALTH COVERAGE FOR WOMEN

A campaign to strike down the pre-existing condition known as womanhood is under way to make sure that every aspect of women's health is covered by the state's health reform package, which is now under consideration by state lawmakers.

The Maine Women's Lobby, a member of the Maine Choice Coalition, is helping spearhead the Women's Health Equity Campaign. The purpose of the campaign is to ensure that maternity care, screening and treatment of breast cancer, contraceptive and abortion services, well child care and other treatment critical to women is covered by whatever health reform package is approved by the state Legislature this session.

The Lobby is taking an active role in this critical campaign. For too long, women have been shortchanged when it comes to having private health insurers or government health insurance programs cover their medical

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FROM THE STATE HOUSE

Health care and welfare reform and increasing protection from abuse are some of the many proposed bills that affect women pending before the second session of the 116th Maine Legislature.

Gov. McKernan is once again proposing a bill to limit funding to women who have additional children while receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC).

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WELFARE REFORM

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themselves are among the first to call for its reform - but why the debate is driven by cruel and incorrect stereotypes.

Nationally, one out of every six women age 15-45 has currently or in the past received AFDC. Most of these families received AFDC for less than one year, and 70 percent received it for less than two years, at any one time. Employment is the most common reason that families leave AFDC. In Maine, nearly 50 percent of 1993 participants in ASPIRE, a program designed to help AFDC recipients, reported having worked within the last year. For the majority, receiving AFDC is a transient, not a static, condition.

Regrettably, because welfare reform debate is driven by these powerful stereotypes that define the problem as individual moral failure, politicians seek solutions at modifying individual behavior. Politically popular proposals would

- deny additional benefits to families having children while receiving assistance
- offer bonuses to welfare recipients who marry or agree to use Norplant
- mandate work in exchange for benefits.

These proposals are deeply rooted in the stereotype and do not take into account rising unemployment, declining wage levels, gender-based inequality and disappearing fringe benefits.

Why is "welfare reform" such fertile ground for politicians? The answer seems simple enough — everyone hates welfare. Conservatives hate it. Liberals hate it. And the women and children who receive it are among the first to say it needs to be overhauled.

Despite the increase in the number of female, single-parent households over the last two decades, these families are not yet valued by our society as two-parent families are.

Over 90 percent of families receiving AFDC are headed by women. The cultural belief persists that a single mother on AFDC must have done something wrong: It was her fault she became pregnant or got divorced and can't support herself. A "family", as Dan Quale never hesitated to remind us, has a father in it. If we doubt this proposition for a minute, we need only look at the very different ways in which "dependency" is viewed in our welfare and income tax systems.

Consider a family that includes a father, mother and two children. The father works and makes \$50,000 per year. The mother does not work because she wants to stay home and raise the children (as is still the case in 40 per cent of married households.) When this family files its income tax return, it claims three personal exemptions worth \$7,050, and qualifies (assuming they fall into the 28 percent tax bracket) for almost \$2,000 in tax relief. Taxpayers have subsidized "dependency" in this family to the tune of \$2,000 annually without blinking an eye, although their annual income is well above that of the average Maine family.

Now, consider their neighbor who lives on the other side of town. She is raising two children alone and survives on an annual income from AFDC of just about \$5,000. She receives no child support, and even with food stamps her income remains well below the poverty level. Unlike her neighbors, who despite their high income receive nearly half the amount of "public assistance" that she does, her "dependency" does not go unnoticed — instead it has risen to the top of our national domestic agenda.

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BREAKFAST OF CHAMPION SPEAKERS HERALD REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Eleanor "Eldie" Acheson, assistant attorney general in the Department of Justice, and Joanne D'Arcangelo, chairwoman of the Maine Choice Coalition, commemorated the importance of choice at the Lobby's annual Breakfast of Champions on Jan. 19.

The annual breakfast, which recognizes the U.S. Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision that recognized the right of women to choose abortion, was held at the Holiday Inn by the Bay and attended by 150.

Acheson, the assistant attorney general for policy development and former law clerk for U.S. District Court Judge Edward T. Gignoux of Portland, underscored the importance of Roe v. Wade and the need for states like Maine to protect women's reproductive rights.

"It is important to remember that what has been lasting and enduring in this country has come from the states," Acheson said.

(The breakfast was held two weeks before the Supreme Court handed down its decision that allows prosecution of protestors who harass and blockade abortion clinics under federal racketeering statutes.)

The Clinton appointee stressed the need to have more women, people of color and those open-minded to the reproductive rights of women, sit on the various

federal courts.

"Women remain at the bottom of our socio-economic ladder," she added, "and an increasing number of those are women of color. I am afraid we will soon become a country with its own peculiar economic and political (system of) apartheid."

D'Arcangelo, public affairs director for the Maine Family Planning Association and a Lobby member, reminded the audience that reproductive freedom in Maine is continually under seige and is far from guaranteed.

To date, the Lobby and other organizations have beaten back five attempts to enact mandatory parental consent legislation, which would require consent, often from both parents, before a teen could obtain an abortion.

The Maine Choice Coalition, of which the Lobby is a member, recently staged an effective campaign to pass a state Reproductive Privacy Act that incorporates the freedoms guaranteed by Roe v. Wade into state law.

While Roe v. Wade is now imprinted in state law, there are still many blockades to reproductive freedom in Maine, said D'Arcangelo. A shortage of physicians willing to perform abortions and the distance women must travel to obtain an abortion are major hurdles in this rural state.

Low-income women, for whom abortions are not covered by Medicaid, continue to face tremendous geographic and economic obstacles in their search for true reproductive freedom.

D'Arcangelo, Lobby members and others are hoping the 'Women's Health Equity Campaign will ensure comprehensive health care, including access to abortion services, for all women.

HEALTH CARE

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treatment and tests. For too long, women have not received their fair share of the medical research and treatment dollars.

On Tuesday, March 8, the Lobby and other members of the choice coalition are staging an intergenerational lobbying day. The purpose of the day is to let lawmakers know women are serious about including health care coverage that will ensure our mothers, daughters, sisters and aunts have the medical coverage they need to lead healthy lives.

This campaign is an ambitious one that needs your help. The Lobby is looking for women who are willing to tell their stories about why pap smears, mammograms, contraception, abortions, menopausal and post-menopausal care and pre-natal care are crucial to our lives.

How would your life be different if you had, or did not have health insurance? What happened to you during that time you had no health insurance? What did your friend do when she had no money and needed an abortion, or couldn't get one?

Are you a survivor of breast or cervical cancer that was found during a routine screening? Or did you incur a more severe bout with cancer because you could not afford

to go to a doctor and have it diagnosed earlier?

Convincing legislators that women's health deserves their attention is an ambitious plan. Even if you or your friends don't have stories to share this day, the Lobby encourages you to come to the state house for the lobbying day and bring your family members.

We all need to talk with our legislators about the need to cover services for women of all ages.

The tentative schedule for the day includes a breakfast forum to discuss health care issues, a lobbying training workshop, lobbying, a press conference and lunch with legislators. After a day in the statehouse, join Lobby members for a reception from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at the Senator Inn.

Please fill out the form and mail it to the Lobby as soon as possible at P.O. Box 309, Hallowell, ME 04345.

If you cannot attend the lobbying day, please consider helping with the phone tree or getting your friends and relatives to write or call their legislators to stress the importance of having all reproductive health care services including in Maine's health care reform.

Phone banks will be operated from the YMCA and Planned Parenthood in Portland and from several places in Augusta and Bangor.

YES! I WANT TO HELP ASSURE WOMEN'S REPRODUCTIVE NEEDS ARE HEARD BY LEGISLATORS.

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____
street town zip

___ I will attend the March 8 lobbying day. I would like to take a bus if one is available from ___ Portland ___ Bangor.

___ I have a story I'd be willing to tell : ___ to my legislator ___ in person ___ in a letter ___ at a press event on March 8th day.

___ I will help with phone calls in ___ Augusta ___ Portland ___ Bangor ___ from my home

___ I can't attend but here's a donation to assure women's reproductive health needs are met! ___ Please keep me on the Women's Health Equity Campaign mailing list.

Return to: Women's Health Equity Campaign, P.O. Box 309, Hallowell, ME 04345

FROM THE STATE HOUSE

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The Lobby and other groups are also fighting hard for a comprehensive health care package that will make available to all women — regardless of income — the medical services they need to lead healthy lives. Those services include abortion and contraception services, mammogram and pap smear screening and other critical services that are currently unattainable and unaffordable for many in Maine.

Here is a partial listing of bills affecting women and children in Maine:

L.D. 1727: An Act to Affect the Credit of People who are in Default of Child Support Payments
Summary: this bill repeals the provisions adopted in Public Law 1993, chapter 410, Part V, that authorizes the suspension, revocation and denial of professional and motor vehicle licenses for parents to owe child support. The MWL is in opposition to this bill because the current law has permitted DHS to collect over \$5 million in unpaid child support. If enacted, this bill would eliminate an effective tool for child support collection. Oppose.
Status: Referred to Committee on Judiciary

L.D. 1802: An Act to Adopt the Uniform Interstate Family Support Act.
Summary: This bill would allow Maine to adopt the Uniform Interstate Support Act limiting child and family support orders to a single state, eliminating interstate jurisdictional issues and facilitating the collection of support payments.
Status: Referred to committee on Judiciary.

Health Care L.D. 1185: An Act to Increase Access to Primary Health Care by Redefining the Practice of Advanced Nursing

Summary: Proposes to increase access to primary health care by removing restrictions to practice that currently exist. It clarifies the eligibility requirements and the approval process for persons who practice advanced professional nursing. Sates: Under Committee Review.

L.D. 1285: An Act to Provide Family Security Through Quality Affordable Health Care

Summary: Proposes establishing a universal access health care system. Key components of this plan are: access for all citizens to comprehensive health care whether we are working or not; cost control with improved quality of care, and administration by a single publicly accountable, non-profit agency.
Status: Under Committee review

TO MAKE YOUR OPINIONS ON LEGISLATION KNOWN TO YOUR LEGISLATORS, YOU CAN CALL THE FOLLOWING NUMBERS:

REPRESENTATIVES: 287-1400 OR 1-800-423-2900

SENATORS 287-1540 OR 1-800-423-6900

IF YOU NEED ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON ANY OF THESE BILLS PLEASE DO NOT HESITATE TO CALL THE LOBBY OFFICE AT 622-0851.

L.D. 1812: An Act Amending the Discovery Rule for Damage Resulting from the Placement of Foreign Objects in the Human Body
Summary: This bill amends the discovery rule for professional negligence actions for a foreign object left in a body by including a chemical compound, prosthetic aid or an object intentionally implanted

or permitted to remain in the patients body.

Personal Safety L.D. 450: An Act to Expand Protection to Persons with Mental Illness and Mental Retardation

Summary: Prohibits sexual contact between persons who provide service to persons with mental illness and mental retardation, and the people who are the recipients of those services.

L.D. 1407: An Act Concerning Primary Care and Parental Responsibilities in Cases of Domestic Abuse
Summary: Proposes preventing violent parents from using custody and visitation as a way to abuse children and/or the other parent. In cases where the parent has a history of family violence, the court shall only allow supervised child visitation at least until the parent has successfully completed a treatment program.

Status: Referred to Committee on Judiciary

L.D. 1436: An Act to Eliminate the Statue of Limitations in Child Molestation Cases

Summary: Removes the statute of limit for civil prosecution of the crime of gross sexual assault and incest if the victim was not at least 16 years of age at the time the crime was committed.

Status: Referred to Committee on Judiciary

L.D. 1718: An Act to Protect Maine Children from Child Pornography Contraband

Summary: Takes first time possession of child pornography a Class D crime, second time offenses a Class C crime and allows law enforcement to confiscate the pornographic material.

Status: Under Committee Review

LOBBY SEEKING BOARD MEMBERS

Love hard work, challenging issues, provocative debates and good company?

The Maine Women's Lobby is looking for you.

The Lobby has openings on its board of directors and is currently seeking new members. The Lobby is open to any woman who has an interest in and commitment to women's issues.

The Lobby is committed to recruiting women of varied age and economic and ethnic backgrounds to increase the diversity of the board.

Time, energy and a willingness to learn are the only essential qualifications.

Skills and expertise that would be helpful include:

- Fundraising
- Public Relations
- Legislative processes
- Health issues.

The responsibilities of board members include:

- Attending monthly meetings in Augusta. (Members live throughout Maine and ridesharing is possible.)

- Working on a board committee.

- Participating in fundraising activities,

- And working on issues critical to the health, safety and future of Maine women and children.

Please nominate a friend, or better yourself, to the Lobby's board.



CELEBRATE WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH WITH OUR 1994 POSTER

The 1994 Women's History poster is now available from the Maine Women's Lobby and the Women's Development Institute for only \$5!

The poster features prominent Maine women who have played an important role in the state and nation's history.

Learn about the contributions of Molly Spotted Elk, Fly Rod Crosby who taught Teddy Roosevelt how to fish with a flyrod and Lillian Nordica.

The poster, which is an ideal learning "gift" for school children and teens, showcases the accomplishments of seven Maine women. Buy it for yourself, your daughters or buy several and donate them to your local schools.

You pay only \$5 for one and \$3 for each additional poster.

Checks should be made to the Maine Women's Lobby and mailed to P.O. Box 15, Hallowell, ME 04347.

NOMINATION FORM

Your Name: _____ Nominee's Name: _____

Address: _____ Address: _____

Day Tele: _____ Day Tele: _____

Eve Tele: _____ Eve Tele: _____

Please tell us about the nominee's interests, skills & qualifications:

Send nominations to Emily Searle, Board Nomination Committee, RFD Box 176, Readfield, ME 04355

MAINE COMMISSION SUPPORTS SEXUAL HARASSMENT CLAIMS

A former assistant director of the Sportsman's Alliance of Maine (SAM) and three female bartenders at the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) post in Sanford have won support from the Maine Human Rights Commission.

A commission investigator recently supported the claims of Cinda Hartman Jones, who said she was forced to quit SAM because of sexual harassment and retaliation that followed after she complained about such treatment.

The commission, which reviews sexual harassment claims in Maine, recently found "reasonable grounds" to believe Katherine Mowry, Ruth Jones and Dawn Sheehan were harassed and fired from their bartenders' jobs at VFW Post 9935.

The commission will now seek a negotiated settlement between the veterans post and the three women. If no agreement is reached, the commission will file a complaint against the post in Superior Court.

The women said they were dismissed in November 1992 because they were viewed as troublemakers who complained of sexual harassment and went on strike.

Mowry told the commission she was subjected to verbal and physical conduct of a sexual nature by the post's commander, James Grant, and the canteen manager Edward Perreault.

The problems escalated on June 16, 1992, when the women voiced their complaints to the post's executive board. According to reports, the session turned into a screaming match and a table was thrown and a ceiling broken.

After a second meeting, the women picketed the post for five days. Eventually the women were reinstated. But after the bar closed temporarily, the women were never rehired.

According to the investigation into the complaint against the Sportsmen's Alliance, Cinda Hartman Jones was forced to resign. She claimed SAM director Thomas Nannery introduced her as his personal assistant with a wink and grin. She reportedly also received a negative job evaluation after Jones told Nannery she didn't want to ride in the alliance's vehicle when Nannery had been drinking. Before that, Jones had received favorable job ratings.

Two other women employed by the alliance had also complained that Nannery hugged and kissed them.

Nannery is no longer employed at the sportsmen's alliance, according to news reports.

The welfare reform debate is driven by stereotypes because we have accepted the deeply mistaken belief that the same choices are available to all families. Despite volumes of evidence to the contrary, as a nation we continue to cling to the idea of an "American dream." We want to believe that those who are willing to work hard will enjoy a secure and comfortable life. It is this belief that explains the popularity of the "two years and you're off" approach to welfare reform first proposed by candidate Clinton during his campaign and now seen by many as fundamental to reform efforts. The deep flaw that underlies this approach is the belief that AFDC recipients can raise their families out of poverty by working full-time. We must look beyond these stereotypes. We must take responsibility for understanding the larger social and economic landscape in which AFDC families struggle to survive. If we do not, we will not only deprive poor women and their children of the real help that they badly want and need, but, and perhaps most dangerous of all, we will contribute, by our silence, to "solutions" that will perpetuate low-wage "women's work" in our nation's workforce for many years to come.

**WE ACCEPT WITHOUT
QUESTIONS THE USE OF PUBLIC
DOLLARS TO SUPPORT
"DEPENDENCY" IN THE TWO-
PARENT FAMILY, WHILE WE
STEREOTYPE AND DEGRADE
LOW-INCOME SINGLE MOTHERS
WHO RECEIVE WELFARE.**

WELFARE REFORM

THE PRICE OF LOW WAGES

If we are to really understand the problems of single mothers who receive AFDC and solve them, we must begin by looking beyond the welfare system. We must stop defining these families only as "welfare recipients" and talk about who they really are - they are women, they are poor, they have children, and from time to time to cope with their economic circumstances they receive AFDC.

IF THE GREAT MAJORITY OF WOMEN RECEIVING AFDC DO WORK NOW OR HAVE WORKED IN THE PAST, WHY AREN'T THEY "SELF-SUFFICIENT"? WHY DO THEY CONTINUE TO APPEAR ON THE WELFARE ROLLS? THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT HAS ACCURATELY POINTED OUT FOR YEARS THAT THERE ARE SUBSTANTIAL INEQUITIES BETWEEN HOW MEN AND WOMEN FARE IN THE WORKPLACE.

We already know much about the struggle facing these women. In America, the poverty rate for families headed by women is six times as high as for married couple families. (The poverty level for a family of three is \$991 per month). Most women move between AFDC and the low wage job market. Some families rely on both AFDC and work simultaneously, while others alternate between AFDC and work at different times. The overwhelming majority of people who receive AFDC have worked. If we look at the

families who received AFDC in Maine between January 1990 and July 1993, we see that 62 per cent of them also reapplied during that period, indicating that they had been on and off assistance more than one.

In 1993, women earned only 75 cents to each man's dollar. The higher the percentage of women in any one occupation, the lower the pay. Even when the educational requirement and levels of responsibility are comparable, the pay is not. Consider, for example, the median wage of a secretary (\$8.66/hr.) versus that of a maintenance carpenter (\$9.89). These jobs have comparable language, math and skill level requirements, yet the secretary's pay is 15 per cent less. This example is typical of the disparity that exists between men's and women's wages.

How low are women's wages? By 1990, almost one in every four women working full-time worked for low wages — wages that do not permit a wage earner to raise a family of four above the poverty level. Women are three times more likely than men to work at part-time jobs with no health insurance.

Median earnings for female high school graduates (with no college) working full-time in 1991 were less than those of fully employed men who were high school drop-outs. Men with an associate's degree working full-time earned nearly the same as similarly employed women with a master's degree.

As disturbing as these inequities are, they actually overstate the prospects for single mothers in the workplace. A national sample of single mothers who received AFDC for at least two out of a 24 month survey period, reported working at jobs that paid an average of \$4.40 an hour (in 1990 dollars); 44 per cent of these women had two or more jobs during the 24 month period. There was no evidence that job

change resulted in a better job in terms of increasing wages, lengths of employment or the likelihood of full time work.

These shocking numbers help us understand why most mothers who leave AFDC for employment are likely to return. One study concluded that almost 40 per cent of people who leave AFDC for employment return within a year; almost two-thirds return within five years.

THE VOLATILITY OF THE LOW WAGE JOB MARKET WITH ITS HIGH PROPORTION OF PART-TIME AND SHORT-TERM JOBS TELLS A BIG PART OF THE STORY BEHIND WELFARE. BUT WE MUST ALSO INVESTIGATE OTHER FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE ECONOMIC PLIGHT OF LOW-INCOME MOTHERS AND THEIR CHILDREN.

TWO PARENTS IN ONE

Working parents know the stress that full-time employment places on families. Imagine raising children on \$4.40 an hour with no benefits in a job where you can be easily replaced. Single mothers do not have the benefit of two incomes to raise their children.

Only 27 percent of Maine AFDC families receive child support payments from an absent parent. The lack of health care coverage associated with low-wage jobs and the inadequate supply of affordable child care place tremendous additional pressures on mothers attempting to escape poverty through work.

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WELFARE REFORM

Women in these families must be both mother and father — nurturer and provider — to their children. Even if they are emotionally and physically able to remain stalwart parents and workers, they can lose their job over the most ordinary of life's events. Leaving work to care for a sick child, losing child care, or having an automobile breakdown often lead to job loss.

THE TRADITIONAL SOURCE OF SUPPORT FOR UNEMPLOYED WORKERS — UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE BENEFITS — ARE OFTEN NOT AVAILABLE TO THESE FAMILIES. JOB LOSS FOR MOST "PERSONAL" REASONS, LIKE THE LOSS OF CHILD CARE OR TRANSPORTATION, DISQUALIFIES A FAMILY FROM RECEIVING UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS. ALSO, MANY LOW-WAGE EARNERS FAIL TO MEET THE EARNINGS REQUIREMENTS NECESSARY TO QUALIFY FOR BENEFITS.

Benefit limitations on persons who perform seasonal work may also disproportionately impact females. Although women represented 46 per cent of all persons in the labor force in 1992, they represented only 37 per cent of those receiving unemployment insurance benefits.

For these families, the AFDC program serves as their unemployment insurance system. A recent national survey found that only 11 per cent of those who navigate between welfare and work receive unemployment benefits when they become unemployed. (This percentage is likely to be slightly higher in Maine because of the relatively low-wage qualifying standards in our

unemployment program. Job loss disqualifications and seasonality provisions, however, are likely to be as, if not more, harsh than in other states.)

LACK OF TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Relatively low educational levels are also a major contributor keeping these families in poverty. At least 35 percent of families that receive AFDC in Maine lack a high school diploma or its equivalent. If a household head has not completed high school, her family is twice as likely to receive AFDC than if she has a high school diploma or equivalent. While 56 percent of Maine's AFDC families have completed high school, even those families are almost twice as likely to receive AFDC than the household head with one to three years of college. Furthermore, those without high school diploma are three times more likely than those with one, and 15 times more likely than those with one year of college, to receive AFDC for two full years.

DISABILITY AND LONG-TERM AFDC

ONLY A SMALL PERCENTAGE — BETWEEN 13 AND 17 PERCENT — OF ALL RECIPIENTS REMAIN ON AFDC CONTINUOUSLY FOR FIVE YEARS OR MORE.

In general, the household heads of these families tend to be severely disadvantaged educationally, lack a supportive extended family, or have disabled children or a work-inhibiting disability.

An analysis of data from the 190 Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), a national survey of non-institutionalized adults shows that nearly one in every five women receiving AFDC aged 15-45 has a functional disability. This is substantially higher than the one out of ten rate for all women nationwide in the same age group.

Many other women on AFDC do not have a disability themselves but care for a child or another immediate family member with a disability. In total, over one-third of all AFDC families include a person with a disability. While certainly many people with a disability can work, and should be given that opportunity, many have work limitations that must be considered in evaluating their ability to support themselves alone in the marketplace.

Viewed in this context, the AFDC program begins to look more like a "safety net" and less like "a way of life."

PROJECT OPPORTUNITY IS NO OPPORTUNITY

McKernan has just announced the third welfare reform initiative of his administration called "Project Opportunity." The centerpiece of his proposal is a \$2,500 financial incentive for employers in the private sector who agree to hire AFDC recipients. Under this proposal, there are no wage level or benefit standards necessary for employers to qualify for this subsidy. Subsidized employers need not offer any training to participants. Nothing in the proposal requires that an attempt be made to find jobs that will lead to better opportunities in the future. Mothers, regardless of

WELFARE REFORM

their circumstances or that of their children, must take these jobs or lose their assistance.

In view of these facts, Project Opportunity seems to hold little opportunity for families hoping to escape poverty. But the proposal poses more problems.

For wage subsidies to be successful, employers must find the offer of subsidized workers irresistible. Previous experience has been quite the contrary. Since the mid-1970's, the federal government has experimented with at least three major targeted wage subsidy programs, similar to the one which the Governor has proposed, aimed at improving the employment prospects of disadvantaged workers. Only a small fraction of subsidized job seekers typically find employment under these programs.

In fact, there is considerable evidence that workers presenting wage subsidies to prospective employers were significantly less likely to gain job placements than were otherwise identified workers whose eligibility for subsidies was not advertised. In other words, subsidies hurt rather than helped welfare clients find jobs because employers used the subsidy to screen them out of consideration as undesirable employees. Such a result is even more likely in today's job market where employers have a greater pool of unemployed from which to choose.

Evaluation of programs over the last decade that emphasize job placement for AFDC recipients while providing little or no education or training, found that none were effective in raising families above the poverty level. Some did not even raise earnings, increase employment or reduce welfare benefits. The principle evaluator of the mandatory work experiments of the 1980's concluded that "Alone,

these programs do not offer an immediate cure for poverty or dependence. Their impacts are modest; many people remain dependent and those who move off welfare remain poor."

Among the most touted experiments using a mandated work model was the SWIM Program in San Diego, California. This experiment was considered successful because it increased earnings and decreased welfare payments. But even this benefit did not last; Over time, the "control group" in this experiment caught up with the experimental group by finding employment of their own, while many members of the "experimental group", having obtained work initially, lost it and returned to AFDC.

MOST TROUBLING OF ALL, A WORK REQUIREMENT THAT DOES NOT INCLUDE WAGE OR BENEFIT STANDARDS, AND IS NOT TARGETED AT RAISING POOR WOMEN AND THEIR CHILDREN OUT OF POVERTY, WILL INEVITABLY PERPETUATE THE GENDER-BASED INEQUITIES THAT ALREADY EXIST IN THE WORKPLACE. THESE EFFORTS WILL DO LITTLE TO COUNTERACT THE FEMINIZATION OF POVERTY, AND, IN FACT, WILL SERVE TO INSTITUTIONALIZE IT.

Thus, even this program cannot be seen a successful when evaluated as a long-term strategy for either

reducing welfare rolls or improving the economic condition of poor families. In short, SWIM did not lead to better jobs than recipients had previously had. It did not make them financially better off. It did not reduce their level of poverty. SWIM only had a modest effect on welfare enrollment at the end of the five year period. For the most part, SWIM simply offset welfare income with income from earnings without increasing the overall income of the family. Some participants actually lost income.

The research also strongly suggests that the work requirement programs success best for those who are most "job ready" and would probably become employed anyway, and are least successful for people who need extensive skill training or rehabilitative services.

Finally, the Governor's plan will divert very limited public funds now available for the ASPIRE Program to a purpose with little prospect for making a real difference in people's lives. If the same \$2,500 targeted for employer subsidies was invested instead in educational or training opportunities so that women could enter the labor market with full earnings potential, the long term benefit would be much greater, not just for the family but for taxpayers as well.

Women do not have to be convinced that education is the most effective route out of poverty, nor do they have to be coerced to participate. There are currently only enough resources to enable 5,000 AFDC recipients to participate in ASPIRE (the state's education and training program for AFDC families) yet 7,000 more are on waiting lists hoping for the chance to get into training or go back to school.

continued on next page

WELFARE REFORM

THE REAL ANSWERS FOR LOW- INCOME MOTHERS

Research suggests that the best chance for a woman to achieve above poverty-level wages is to attain a post-secondary education. A study of AFDC college graduates in New York in 1988 found that 88 per cent had been employed since graduation from college, and 45 per cent were earning more than \$20,000 annually.

In 1990, this study was replicated in five other states, all confirming that a college degree can have dramatic benefits for welfare recipients/ This study also showed that in addition to improving their family's standard of living, recipients universally reported that college dramatically improved their self-esteem and had made them better role models for their children. They said they were better able to guide their children in their studies and personal lives and that along with pride in their mother's success, the children had gained a new sense of their own possibilities in life.

Finally, if we accept the reality that low-wage jobs will continue to exist, and that poor women will continue to fill many of them, we must find strategies that will make up the difference between what an unskilled single mother can earn and what she needs to support her family. A higher minimum wage, expanded earned income tax credit, pay equity, antidiscrimination enforcement, unionization (which we haven't discussed, but which is found to be strongly related to higher wages regardless of gender or minority status), and targeted economic development strategies would all work to improve the economic condition of poor women

and their families. Reforming the unemployment compensation system so that it will be more responsive to the needs of women workers is another important step.

In Maine's legislation this year, we have the opportunity to take one step in the right direction by enacting a bill (LD 999) introduced last session by Rep. Mary Cathcart (D-Orono) and held over by the Human Resources Committee. Based on a successful New York program, this bill would offer an alternative to the AFDC Program for working families with child support orders. It would allow families to work their way out of poverty by providing a monthly "child assistance" payment until the combination of their earnings and child support increased their family income to 125 per cent of the poverty level. Rep. Cathcart's bill offers an important policy alternative to the Governor's bill because of its commitment to help raise poor working families above the poverty level.

That is, after all, what welfare reform should be all about.

QUICK FACTS

During 1992, American women age 16 and older experienced their highest rate of participation in the paid labor force ever. The federal government reported 57.8 percent of 100 million women participated in the labor force. Women accounted for 60 percent of total labor force growth between 1982 and 1992.

Labor force participation continues to be highest for women in the 35-44 age group. Seventy-seven percent of women in this age group were employed, 74 percent of those ages 25-34, 73 percent of those 45-54 and 47 percent of those 55 to 64.

Day Care for Bridge Workers

If a day care center is built, will women work (and be hired) at the massive repair job on the Portland Bridge?

The Maine and federal Departments of Transportation are proposing to build a day care center in Legere Park off Waterman Drive in South Portland for Portland Bridge project construction workers.

Officials hope the day care center will draw more women workers to the project and its non-traditional jobs.

If the South Portland City Council agrees to sublet a portion of the park for the day care center, it would open in May and serve about 25 children. The center would be within walking distance of the bridge.

PORTLAND'S GAY RIGHTS LAW STILL UNTESTED

The first two civil rights lawsuits that cite Portland's gay rights ordinance have been settled out of court.

The civil rights ordinance prohibits employment, housing and other types of discrimination based on sexual orientation.

Last September, two women filed separate suits claiming they were fired because they are lesbians. Leslie Johnson, who had sued Bagel Works, accepted a \$3,000 settlement. Cynthia Dowd reached an undisclosed settlement with Bath Iron Works's, which has a facility in Portland.

Dowd said a BIW supervisor told her she looked like a "dyke" and another asked her to dress more femininely. She was transferred from BIW's Bath facility to Portland and then was fired.

BIW had denied the allegations and challenged the enforceability of the city's civil rights ordinance.

SPRING GIFT IDEAS

A GIFT FROM OUR CATALOG WILL ADD SPECIAL MEANING TO YOUR JOURNEY INTO SPRING!



NOTE CARDS

Striking and colorful "Many Strong and Beautiful Women" design by Kiki. 5x7-inch greeting card printed on recycled gloss stock using vegetable-based inks.

MWL price: \$1 ea.; 6 for \$5.

T-SHIRTS

Heavy 100% pre-shrunk cotton featuring the colorful, multi-cultural designs "Many Strong and Beautiful Women" (pictured) or "Women Help Women" (not shown.) Sizes M, L, XL

\$15 each

BUMPER STICKERS • \$1 EACH

**AGAINST ABORTION?
DON'T HAVE ONE.**

**I'M PRO-CHOICE
AND I VOTE**

**My Voice
Pro Choice**

MAINE WOMEN'S LOBBY GIFT MEMBERSHIP

For a gift that keeps on giving consider a gift membership in the Maine Women's Lobby. Send \$25 (or more) for each gift membership and the Lobby will send a card announcing your gift.

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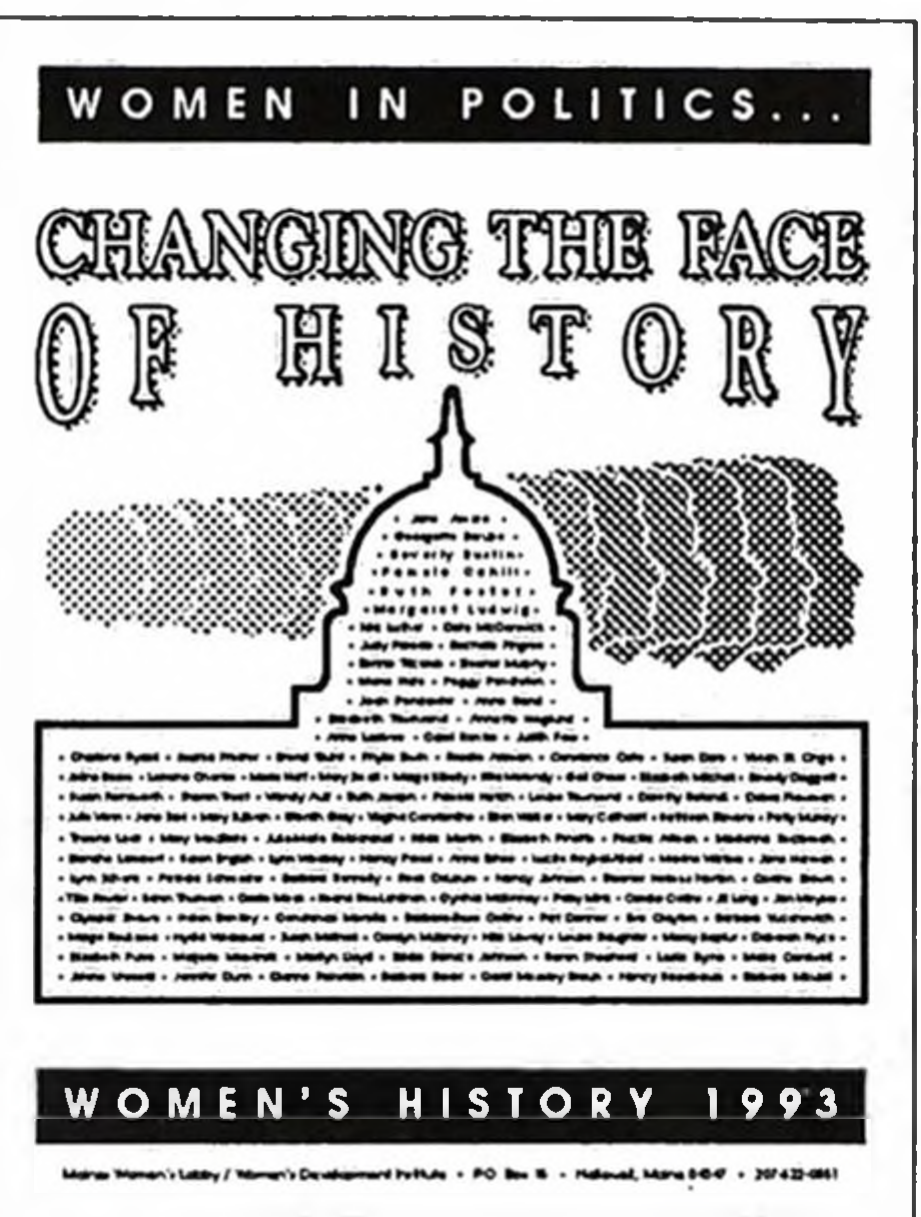
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POSTERS

The 3-color 1993 poster — "Changing The Face of History" — lists all the women elected to Congress and the Maine Legislature. Get yours . . .

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I WANT TO HELP IMPROVE THE LIVES OF MAINE WOMEN AND THEIR FAMILIES.

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☐ **REGULAR**
\$500 Life

☐ \$250 Sustaining

☐ \$100 Sponsoring

☐ \$50 Supporting

☐ \$25 Individual

☐ \$1-24 Other

☐ **PLEDGE**
Total annual pledge \$ _____

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P.O. Box 15, Hallowell Maine 04247

☐ I am already a member. Please use the enclosed contribution of \$ _____ to advocate on behalf of Maine women and their families.

Name _____ Phone _____ Business _____

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☐ I do not want my name given to other groups.

The Maine Women's Lobby is committed to representing women of all economic means. Any contribution you are able to make will entitle you to membership. Please make your check payable to: Maine Women's Lobby and return it with this card.

COME TO OUR ANNUAL RECEPTION!

The Maine Women's Lobby will hold its annual Augusta reception

Tuesday, March 8 5:30-7:30 p.m.

The Senator Inn • Western Avenue, Augusta

State lawmakers, government officials, representatives from other organizations and Augusta area residents all join Lobby members for hors d'oeuvres and a festive reception, so mark the date now and plan to come!



The Maine Women's Lobby Newsletter is the official publication of the Maine Women's Lobby.

Linda Wilcox, Chair
Laura Footman, Executive Director
Christine Kukka, Editor

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