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## The Lobbyist No. 28 (Winter 2000)

Maine Women's Lobby Staff

*Maine Women's Lobby*

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a publication of the  
**MAINE  
WOMEN'S  
LOBBY**  
and the Women's  
Development Institute

*Rep. Judy Powers and Sen. Betty Lou Mitchell discuss women's health with participants in the health policy luncheon.*

## ● MWL Policy Briefing Spotlights Women's Health

In Augusta, on February 3<sup>rd</sup> and in 13 state capitals across America, policymakers introduced a proactive policy agenda for the 2000 legislative sessions that confronts the key issues affecting American families, from health care to pay equity, child care and education. This national movement for change has been sparked by the Center for Policy Alternatives (CPA), one of America's leading nonpartisan, nonprofit public policy and leadership development centers, in partnership with state and national leaders across the nation.

Locally, the Maine Women's Lobby hosted a luncheon and policy briefing with state legislators and grassroots leaders to challenge them to invest in women's health by preventing disease, promoting recovery, and improving access to health services and quality for women and girls over their lifespan.

In her welcome, the Lobby's Executive Director Laura Fortman stated, "The topic of women's health has routinely focused on reproductive health. Today, we have an opportunity to look at health in a broader context, one that recognizes the connections between a woman's economic status and her health status. According to recent studies, the lower a woman's in-

come, the more likely she is to have a disability or chronic disease and generally poor health."

Senator Betty Lou Mitchell, (R), Health and Human Services Committee, and Representative Judy Powers, (D), Appropriations Committee, discussed bills each of them will be introducing to focus attention on women's health in Maine.

Senator Mitchell said, "I am delighted to be sponsoring a bill to create an office of women's health. This bill will reduce fragmentation of women's health services by building on the good work that has already been done in Maine. We can create an effective program for a fraction of the cost of what other states have spent on women's health initiatives."

Representative Powers concurred and affirmed the need for legislation that recognizes the unique health care needs of women and addresses the barriers that many women face in accessing health services. As she stated, "Women are the gatekeepers to health care. Yet they frequently neglect their own health, sacrificing their health needs so that those of other family members are met first."

The 25 women in the room embraced the concepts in both bills and were happy to hear that the bill sponsors would be recommending to have the bills combined to increase the likelihood of passage. This is an exciting example of a bi-partisan effort to coordinate policies related to women's health.

Inside:

- Policy Focus Insert on Women's Health
- Legislative Update
- Women's Leadership Project Update



The following are some of the key bills that the Maine Women's Lobby is working on this session:

## Health Care

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### **L.D. 1477: An Act to Promote Healthy Maine Families**

Sponsor: Sen. Pingree (D-Knox). Health and Human Services Committee.

This proposal would provide Medicaid coverage to the parents of the children covered by last year's Medicaid expansion. It would make Medicaid available to nearly 10,000 parents in families with income under 150% of the federal poverty level—\$20,820 for a family of 3. **Status:** This bill has been tabled by the Committee while allocation of the tobacco settlement funds is discussed. Legislators still need to see strong public support for this bill if it is to be funded and provide the critically needed health care to Maine families.

### **L.D. 2552: An Act to Allocate from the Fund for a Healthy Maine**

Sponsor: House Speaker Steve Rowe (D-Portland). Appropriations Committee

This is House Speaker Steve Rowe's plan for spending the tobacco settlement. Several proposals for spending the tobacco \$\$ have been put forth but this is the ONLY one which includes an expansion of Medicaid to cover low-income working parents. **Status:** The Appropriations Committee is working on this bill.

### **L.D. 2374: An Act to Establish an Office of Women's Health**

Sponsor: Senator Betty Lou Mitchell (R-Penobscot). Health and Human Services Committee

Representative Judy Powers (D-Rockland) and Senator Betty Lou Mitchell both introduced bills this session that would formalize attention to women's health in Maine. The two bills have been combined by the Committee using the title of Senator Mitchell's bill, LD 2374: An Act to Establish an Office of Women's Health. The goal of the office is to prevent disease, promote recovery, and improve access to health services and quality for women and girls over their lifespan.

**Status:** This bi-partisan legislation received a unanimous ought-to-pass report from the Committee. It will be debated by the full House and Senate in the weeks ahead.

### **Patient Bill of Rights**

The Banking and Insurance Committee is developing a Maine Patient Bill of Rights. The Committee has looked at specific components of such a bill in several work sessions already and will continue to work on it in March. Based on a straw vote taken at a work session last month, the bill will not include a key provision that lets a woman have direct access to Ob/Gyn services without a referral from her primary care provider.

### **L.D. 2307: An Act to Protect the Health and Well-Being of a Nursing Infant of Separated or Divorcing Parents**

Sponsor: Senator Cathcart (D-Penobscot). Judiciary Committee

This bill adds breast-feeding an infant under one year of age to the list of factors a judge may consider in deciding parental rights and responsibilities. **Status:** The Committee issued a divided report on this bill. All of the Senators on the Judiciary Committee supported this bill so calls to House members are particularly important as this bill is debated by the full legislature.

## Economic Security

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### **L.D. 1262: An Act to Increase the Minimum Wage in Maine.** Sponsor: Sen. Pingree (D-Knox). Labor Committee.

This bill would increase the minimum wage by \$1.00 in .50 increments over a 2 year period. **Status:** L.D. 1262 was voted out of Committee with a majority ought-to-pass.

### **L.D. 357: An Act Raising the Minimum Wage.** Sponsor: Rep. Hatch (D-Skowhegan). Labor Committee.

This bill would send increasing the minimum wage out to be voted on by the people in a referendum. **Status:** As of press time, the Labor Committee had not yet acted on this bill.

### **L.D. 2498: An Act to Increase Access to High Quality Jobs through the Workforce Investment Act**

Sponsor: Senator Douglass (D-Androscoggin)

This legislation proposes to establish priorities and set minimum standards and service requirements for the state's implementation of the Federal Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA, PL 105-220) in the year 2000. Specifically, this legislation will establish state-wide wage and benefit standards for training programs and target a substantial portion of the funds for actual training. **Status:** This bill is being worked on by the Labor Committee.



## *Policy Spotlight:*

# Women's Health in Maine

*Much of the legislative work we're doing this session is focused on women's health. Below is some of the research that underpins our policy position on L.D. 2374: An Act to Establish an Office of Women's Health.*

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Women's health has become the focus of increased attention nationally as well as in Maine. Policy makers, health care providers, and advocates for women are increasingly recognizing that gender is a critical variable in health. And new research is confirming what women know from personal experience: health and disease often affect women and men in different ways.

Regardless of your age or health status, you've probably had an experience in which obtaining health information or services wasn't as easy as it should be. In the past, the issue of "women's health" has been narrowly defined as women's *reproductive* health. While access to reproductive health services are crucial, women's health needs vary widely over the course of a lifetime. In addition, recent studies of women's health are recognizing a significant connection between women's economic status and their health.

The Maine Women's Health Campaign spent over four years looking at the particular health needs of Maine women through a new lens. The Women's Development Institute was a founding member of the Steering Committee and is represented by Laura Fortman. This statewide effort brought together public health advocates and women's advocates to examine the health status of Maine women and girls and develop strategies to improve their health. Perhaps most importantly, it was the first large-scale attempt to address the link between women's health and economics in Maine.

The Women's Health Campaign identified several critical issues around which to mobilize the Women's Health Initiative, a policy plan to improve women's health through a range of pragmatic, effective and economically sound strategies. The critical issues include:

### **Maine women experience impaired access to health services and information**

Barriers for women seeking health care may include lack of transportation, childcare, or health insurance, lack of health education, inadequate communication between the a woman and her provider, and the fragmentation of health care services. Economics plays a role in many of these barrier and, across the board, is a significant factor in women's ability to access health services and information.

- Maine women experience disproportionately higher poverty rates than men, particularly single mothers and elderly women.
- The median annual earnings for women in Maine working full-time is just \$16,540. Women earn about 69 cents for every dollar earned by their male counterparts.
- The lower a woman's income, the more likely she is to have a disability or chronic disease and generally poor health.
- In 1998, nearly half of women with incomes of \$16,000 or less had no health insurance.



**Women are at the core of Maine families and communities**

Women are the gatekeepers and decision-makers for the health care of their families. They are most often the primary caregivers for their children and for aging or ill relatives. Yet they frequently neglect their own health, sacrificing their health needs so that those of other family members are met first.

- Of the estimated 15% of Americans who are informal caregivers for ill or disabled family members, 72% are women — many of them sandwiched between caring for an ailing relative and caring for their own children.
- Nearly one-third of working women needed to take time off from work in the past year to care for a sick or injured family member. Over half reported that they would lose pay for taking time off for this care.
- Thirteen percent (43,145 families) of Maine’s families are headed by single women, compared to only 3% by single men.

**Women bear a substantial burden of disease and illness in Maine**

Although women generally live longer than men, they do not live their whole lives in better health. Women are more likely than men to die with major physical and mental impairments. While major health problems such as heart disease, cancer and stroke have improved for the general population, the advances for women have not been as great as those for men.

- Heart disease and cancer were the leading killers of Maine women in 1994, accounting for nearly 40,000 years of life lost to Maine women.
- Women suffer a disproportionate amount of the sexually transmitted disease burden.
- Violence against women is a serious health problem. In 1995, Maine men committed nearly 3,000 assaults on women. Because domestic violence is so severely underreported, this number is likely to represent only a fraction of severe physical assaults.

**Mental health, trauma, and substance use have profound effects on women**

Mental disorders and substance abuse are also causes of poor health for Maine women. Depression and trauma are more frequent in women than in men and the effects have repercussions on women’s families and communities.

- 8 - 20% of Maine women experience depression, a rate that is estimated as twice that for men.
- Eating disorders affect 1 in 5 women, mostly young women. Eating disorders can result in severe health complications and death, killing up to 10% of their victims.
- Sixty-four percent of Maine women who have been hospitalized at the Augusta Mental Health Institute report having been physically or sexually abused by their partners.

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The Maine Women’s Health Campaign is supporting the bi-partisan legislation this session to create an Office of Women’s Health. The primary goal of the office is to prevent disease, promote recovery, and improve access to health services and quality for women and girls over their lifespan. It’s activities will include coordinating public and private sector activities relating to women’s health; identifying disparities in health status and access among Maine women; and conducting public education efforts to raise awareness about women’s health issues. By formalizing attention to women’s health within the state, this legislation will help to address the some of the critical issues related to women’s health that were outlined above. At press time, L.D. 2374 had received a unanimous favorable report from the Health and Human Services Committee. For more information on the Women’s Health Initiative or how you can support it, contact the Lobby offices at 622-0851 or by email at MwomenL@aol.com.



**L.D.2415: An Act to Remove Barriers to Adequate Transportation for Low Income Working Parents.**

Sponsor: Rep. McGlocklin (D.-Embden).

This bill would allow low-income people with vehicles who qualify for subsidized child care to also qualify for food stamp eligibility. Currently, ownership of a vehicle is determined an asset for purposes of food stamp eligibility, while it is not for subsidized child care. **Status:** Unanimous favorable committee report.

**L.D. 2516: An Act to Improve Standards for Public Assistance to Maine Employers**

Sponsor: Senator Pingree (D- Knox)

The purpose of this bill is to establish additional standards for the delivery of Maine's limited tax resources for economic development purposes. Employers receiving more than \$10,000 per year in economic development incentives will be required to pay a living wage, provide health insurance and pension benefits, and comply with federal, state and local laws.

**Status:** This bill got a 6-4 favorable vote in the Committee.

**L.D. 103: An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Study Poverty Among Working Parents with Regard to State Earned Income Credit.**

Sponsor: Rep. Povich (D-Ellsworth). Taxation Committee

**Status:** The Committee voted unanimously to give a 5% *state* Earned Income Tax Credit. Because of the fiscal note, this bill will head to the Appropriations table.

## Civil Rights

**L.D. 2239: An Act to Ensure Civil Rights and Prevent Discrimination.**

Sponsor: Senator Abromson (R-Cumberland). Judiciary Committee

In the spring of 1997, after a 20-year battle, the Maine legislature granted protection to all Maine citizens in employment, housing, credit, public accommodation regardless of their sexual orientation. Unfortunately, that law was overturned on Feb. 10, 1998 by a "people's veto". The legislature will take up the issue once again in Jan. 2000. There is a referendum provision attached to the bill and if the legislature endorses the bill, it will go to the people for final approval in Nov. 2000.

**Status:** The Committee voted 7-5-1 in favor of the bill. It now heads to debate in the full legislature. For more information on this bill, see page 4.

**LD 2418: An Act Concerning Offensive Names.**

Sponsor: Rep. Soctomah (Passamaquoddy). Judiciary Committee

This bill would amend Maine's current law prohibiting the use of offensive names by adding the word "squaw" to the definition of offensive place names and prohibit its use to designate "any natural geographic feature or any street, alley, or other road...or any political subdivision of the State." **Status:** Only one member of the Judiciary Committee voted ought-not-to-pass. It will be considered by the entire legislature in the weeks ahead.

## Freedom from Violence

**L.D. 2405: An Act to Increase the Number of Domestic Violence Prosecutors**

Sponsor: Rep. Jabar (D-Waterville). Appropriations Committee

This bill would appropriate funding for 9 additional prosecutors to be used for the prosecution of domestic violence cases.

**Status:** This bill received a unanimous ought-to-pass report from the Appropriations Committee.

**L.D. 2021: An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Propose an Alternative Process for Forensic Examinations for Sexual Assault Victims.**

Sponsor: Rep. Norbert (D-Portland)

This bill directs the Victim Compensation Fund to pay a hospital or health care practitioner directly for the sexual assault forensic exam thereby eliminating the need to victims of sexual assault to pay. It also puts in place procedures for guaranteeing chain of evidence and use of a statewide evidence collection kit. **Status:** This bill received a unanimous ought-to-pass committee report.

**L.D. 2484: An Act to Limit the Issuance of Concealed Firearms Permits**

Sponsor: Rep. Mike Saxl (D-Portland). Criminal Justice Committee

This bill prohibits the issuance of concealed firearms permits to those who have recently demonstrated a propensity for violent behavior. The bill requires that an applicant has not been ordered by a judge within the previous 2 years to cease potentially violent behavior toward another family member. **Status:** The Criminal Justice Committee is working on this bill.

**L.D. 265: An Act to Provide for the License Plates in Support of Domestic Violence Prevention Programs**

Sponsors: Rep. Bagley (D-Machias). Transportation Committee

**Status:** This bill received an unanimous ought-not-to-pass committee report.



# Ensuring Civil Rights for All Maine Citizens

*by Suzanne Brunner, MWL Board Member*

For the twelfth time a bill has been introduced in the Maine legislature to amend the Maine Human Rights Act to include sexual orientation. It has been a long hard struggle to arrive at the bill currently being considered by the legislature. Over the years, each time that a measure has been introduced, it has attempted to address more of the questions and concerns that legislators and the people of Maine have expressed. It is hoped that LD 2239 as amended will finally address all of those issues.

This bill is needed now more urgently than ever. There have been serious repercussions to the repeal of the civil rights act passed by the 118th Legislature. The outcome of the special election, unfortunately, sent a strong message to some, especially youth, that gay and lesbian people are fair game for harassment, vandalism and violence. Since February 1998 there has been an escalation in all three. Legislation must be passed now to give lesbian and gay people and those perceived to be gay or lesbian the same basic rights that everyone else has, and to correct the dangerous perception that attacks on the lesbian and gay community are condoned by the public at large.

The bill contains specific language which addresses the concerns that have been raised over the years:

- It is clear that the bill will not grant "special rights" nor will it convey legislative approval to any person or group of people.
- A referendum is incorporated in the bill.
- Language has been added to the definition of sexual orientation to make it clear that discrimination is prohibited on the basis of sexual orientation—not on the basis of sexual behavior. This bill has never been about sex, it is about discrimination of people who are or who are perceived to be lesbian or gay. The new definition clearly states that sexual orientation does not include, nor will this bill provide any protections for, sexual attraction between a minor and an adult.
- New language makes it clear that the bill will not mandate nor prohibit any educational institution to promote or to include in its curriculum education about sexuality or sexual orientation.
- Statements in the bill also clarify the bill will not establish affirmative action based on sexual orientation, and that employers will be neither be required nor prohibited from extending partnership benefits to their employees.

There has been considerable publicity about the religious exemption provided in the amended bill. It clearly applies to educational and charitable institutions that are managed by a religious denomination. This section is controversial to some and represents a compromise that was not easy for many to accept. To understand this issue, it is important to know that prior bills have long used the phrase "a religious corporation, association or organization is exempt from these provisions."

Although some people have argued that under this old definition, a nonprofit charitable corporation like Catholic Charities would not be exempt, it is not clear that such entities would not have been considered "religious corporations." The amended bill clearly intends to provide no exemption for organizations that receive state funds. To address the issue of state funds, language has been included to make it clear that religious entities will not be exempt from provisions in state contracts that may require them not to discriminate in employment or services on the basis of sexual orientation. While the contract provisions will not offer the same remedies as the Human Rights Act itself, it does offer some kind of protection to persons in those organizations.

The most important overall goal is to send a strong message to everyone that discrimination is wrong. It is important to consider that this message is intended to PREVENT discrimination, not simply to provide penalties and punishment for it after the fact. It is hoped that this bill will provide basic rights to lesbian and gay people and those perceived to be lesbian or gay, and that it is a measure that all people will be able to support at the polls on November 7th.

# WDI Receives Strategic Planning Grant

*by Barbara Ginley, MWL Board Chair*

Millennium hype aside, the start to 2000 has been incredibly exciting for MWL/WDI. At the close of last year we were notified of two grant awards from the Rockefeller Family Fund! One grant will provide general operating support. The second grant however, will give WDI an incredible opportunity to complete a capacity-building project focusing solely on how we can become a stronger, more vital, and effective organization.

Over the next year we will be evaluating and assessing our current structure. Basically, this capacity building project will afford us the opportunity to take the necessary time-out to ask and answer the critical questions that will ensure not only our sustainability, but our future growth. In the end, we hope the plans that are developed will result in an increase in both our external and internal capacities. Although the basis of this grant is to provide us with the insight to sustain and grow WDI, it is not without a firm acknowledgement that the Lobby, and our advocacy work, represent the cornerstone of these sister organizations.

Practically speaking, what this means is that in the next month we will begin the hiring process to bring on a consultant(s) who specializes in organizational development and non-profit strategic planning. Our hope is to have the project wrapped up by the end of this year. So, in the next few months if you get a call or receive an invitation to participate in a focus group, interview, etc., I hope you will take us up on the offer and help to shape the MWL/WDI of the future.





*Rep. Norbert (D-Portland) discussing the legislative process with WLP participants.*

## Women's Leadership Project Update

*by Krista Haapala, WDI Intern*

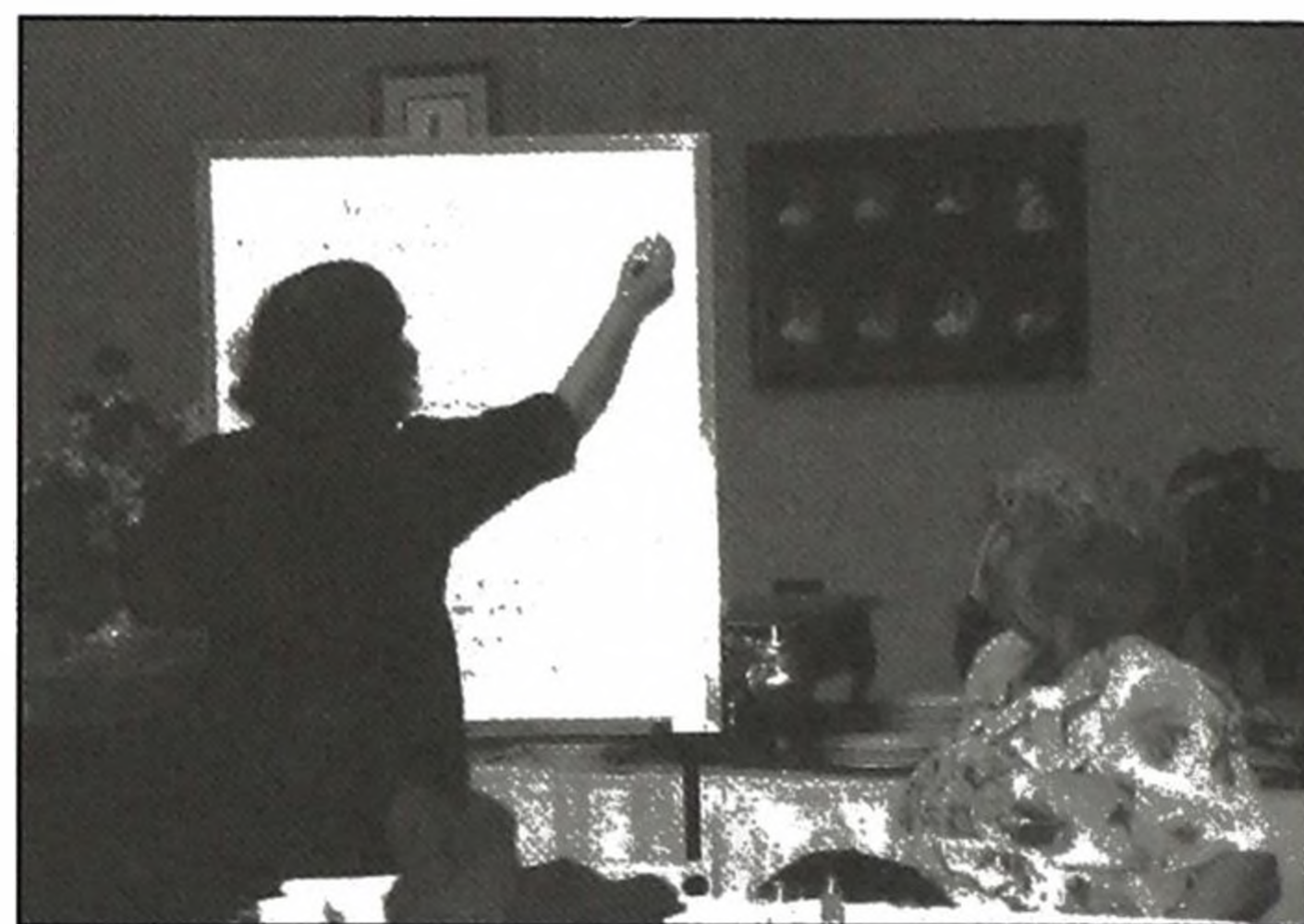
The Women's Leadership Project is an educational training program with the goal of empowering low-income women to participate in the political system. The Project is hosted and conducted jointly by the Women's Development Institute (WDI) and the Maine Equal Justice Partners (MEJP). The 1998 session was the inaugural session of the Project. The second session came to a close in December 1999.

The 1999 session of the Women's Leadership Project was successful and enjoyable. During the fall, ten wonderful women participated in trainings held in Norway and Portland. WDI and MEJP hosted four training sessions in each region. Each training session had a different focus. They included: 1.) leadership style and development, 2.) status of women in the economy, 3.) the legislative process and lobbying, and 4.) educational campaign development and the media.

As part of the trainings on the legislative process and the media, members of the State Legislature and local media were invited to speak to the group. In Norway, Assistant Republican Leader Senator Richard Bennett (R-Oxford County) and Liz Chapman from the Lewiston *Sun-Journal* joined the group. In Portland, Representative William Norbert (D-Port-

land) and Susan Chisholm from Maine Public Radio presented to the group. All the speakers allowed time for questions from the participants and provided insight into the political process.

The women who participated in the Project found it to be informative and fun and made some friends, as did the WDI and MEJP staff who provided the trainings. These graduates of the Project join the 33 graduates from 1998 in continuing the leadership and activism they enhanced by participating. We look forward to continuing to work with the graduates in the future and continuing to strengthen and enhance the Project for sessions to come.



*Chris Hastedt of MEJP outlining the need for expanding access to health care at the Presque Isle forum.*

On December 13<sup>th</sup>, the Women's Leadership Project hosted an information and strategy session in Presque Isle on legislation to expand access to health care for working parents. Ten community members from the Presque Isle area gathered to discuss who's covered by health insurance and who's not; where the opportunities to expand coverage are; and how increased coverage benefits the entire community. Jennifer Fuller, a 1998 WLP participant, talked about her involvement in WLP and what individuals can do to help shape Maine's health care policy. Other panelists included Chris Hastedt of the Maine Equal Justice Partners, Bonnie Post of the Maine Ambulatory Care Coalition, and Laura Fortman, Executive Director of the Women's Development Institute.

## Board & Staff News

For many years, MWL has maintained a membership on the Medicaid Advisory Committee representing the interests of low-income women, and filling one of the "consumer" spots allotted on this committee. This committee provides input/feedback/advice to the Bureau of Medical Services on policy changes and development related to the state's Medicaid Program. At the February 2, 2000 meeting our representative and MWL Board Chair, Barbara Key, was elected chairperson of the Committee.

Liz Keith, Program Assistant, has been elected as co-chair of the Maine Choice Coalition. The Coalition includes more than a dozen organizations and individuals across the state working on grassroots organizing, public education, and legislative advocacy for reproductive choice and privacy for Maine women.

## Leadership Maine

*Leadership Maine* is an annual program of the Maine Development Foundation that prepares statewide leaders to shape Maine's changing economy. In seven sessions throughout the year, *Leadership Maine* provides experiential learning which results in broader understanding of the Maine economy, what is required to be a leader today and new networks with others. Leadership Maine is now accepting applications for the 2000-2001 class. Forty-five diverse public and private sector leaders will be selected. Leadership Maine is particularly interested in having gender balance in their classes. FMI, contact MDF at 207.622.6345 or e-mail [leadme@mdf.org](mailto:leadme@mdf.org) or visit MDF's website at [www.mdf.org](http://www.mdf.org).



# Dates to Remember

**March 31- April 2: Feminist Expo 2000**, Baltimore. Contact the Feminist Majority Foundation Expo 2000 Team at (703) 522-2214 or visit [www.feminist.org](http://www.feminist.org).

**April 27: Take Our Daughters to Work Day.** Sponsored by the Ms. Foundation for Women, TOTWD is a national event to focus on girls' ideas, needs, and dreams. Mainely Girls is coordinating the event in Maine. FMI, call Mary Orear at 230- 0170 or email [megirls@midcoast.com](mailto:megirls@midcoast.com).

**April 29, 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.:** The 6<sup>th</sup> annual **HOPE (Help Organize Peace Earthwide) Festival** at the Bangor Auditorium. The is free event is sponsored by the Peace and Justice Center of Eastern Maine. FMI, all 942-9343 or email [peacectr@mint.net](mailto:peacectr@mint.net)

**May 11: Pay Equity Day.** This day symbolizes the point into the new year that women must work to earn the same amount of money men earned in 1999. According to the AFL-CIO's Working Women's Department, a typical woman in Maine earns just 76 cents for every man's dollar — over \$6,000 a year less than men.

**Ongoing: Everywoman's Money School.** Open to all, these sessions are being offered as a follow-up to the Everywoman's Money Conference. A complete money school schedule is available at [www.greenpurse.com](http://www.greenpurse.com).

**Ongoing: University of Maine Class Book Community Program 2000.** Discussions will be based on *A Midwife's Tale* by Laurel Thatcher Ulrich. Discussions will be held in late March and early April in Portland, Camden and Orono. FMI, call the University of Maine at (207) 581-3142 or register online at [www.ume.maine.edu/~ced/midwife/](http://www.ume.maine.edu/~ced/midwife/).

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*Organizing the lives of Maine women and girls through  
policy development and legislative action.*



The following is a brief summary of the content and status of a few bills the Lobby worked on during the second session of the 119th legislature. Our support ranged from merely monitoring bills to organizing public hearings and activating our members to contact their legislators. Bills that have been signed by the Governor at press time have a Public Law (PL) number in front of them. Most bills that were passed will take effect 90 days after the Governor signs them. Emergency bills, such as the budget, take effect immediately. For more information on any of the bills below call our offices at 622-0851.

## Ballot Language, November 7, 2000

"Do you favor ratifying the action of the 119th Legislature whereby it passed an act extending to all citizens regardless of their sexual orientation the same basic rights to protection against discrimination now guaranteed to citizens on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin in the areas of employment, housing, public accommodation and credit and where the act expressly stated that nothing in the act confers legislative approval of, or special rights to, any person or group of persons?"

## Civil Rights

**PL 629: An Act to Ensure Civil Rights and Prevent Discrimination.** Sponsor: Senator Abromson (R-Cumberland) In the spring of 1997, after a 20-year battle, the Maine legislature granted protection to all Maine citizens in employment, credit, public accommodation and housing regardless of their sexual orientation. Unfortunately, that law was overturned on Feb. 10, 1998 by a "people's veto". The legislature has once again passed a bill prohibiting discrimination in these areas. There is a referendum provision attached to the bill (language appears above) and now the bill goes to the people for final ratification Nov. 7, 2000. Remember this time we will be voting "YES!" to support these basic rights!

**PL 613: An Act Concerning Offensive Names.** Sponsor: Rep. Soctomah (Passamaquoddy) This bill amended Maine's law prohibiting the use of offensive names by adding the word "squaw" to the list of offensive place names and prohibiting its use to designate "any natural geographic feature or any street, alley, or other road...or any political subdivision of the State." **Status:** Enacted.

## Economic Security

### Increasing the Minimum Wage

Once again the legislature, with bi-partisan support, approved bills to increase the minimum wage and once again, the Governor did not support those bills. A recent study by the Institute for Women's Policy Research and the Economic Policy Institute in Washington, D.C. indicated that increasing the minimum wage to \$6.15/hr. would benefit approximately 36,000 working women in Maine.

**L.D. 357: An Act Raising the Minimum Wage.** Sponsor: Rep. Hatch (D-Skowhegan). This bill would send increasing the minimum wage out to be voted on by the people in a referendum. **Status:** Vetoed.

**L.D. 1262: An Act to Increase the Minimum Wage in Maine.** Sponsor: Sen. Pingree (D-Knox). This bill would have increased the minimum wage by \$.70 in .35 increments over a 2-year period. **Status:** This bill was not signed by Governor and the legislature has adjourned -- in effect this is a "pocket veto" which means that the Governor has killed the bill.

**P.L. 705: An Act to Increase Access to High Quality Jobs through the Workforce Investment Act.** Sponsor: Senator Douglass (D-Androscoggin) This bill states that a person in training under the Workforce Investment Act is deemed to be in approved training for purposes of qualifying for unemployment benefits, but provides that the law is not effective if inconsistent with federal law. **Status:** Enacted.

**L.D. 2516: An Act to Improve Standards for Public Assistance to Maine Employers** Sponsor: Senator Pingree (D-Knox) The purpose of this "living wage" bill was to establish additional standards for the delivery of Maine's limited tax resources for economic development purposes. Employers receiving more than \$10,000 per year in tax breaks through such programs as Tax Increment Financing or Business Equipment Tax Refund would have been required to pay a higher minimum wage. **Status:** Vetoed.

**PL 637: An Act to Remove Barriers to Adequate Transportation for Low Income Working Parents.** Sponsor: Rep. McGlocklin (D-Emden). This bill allows low-income families with children to have one car, regardless of value, and still qualify for food stamp benefits even if they do not receive cash assistance from TANF. **Status:** Enacted

**L.D. 103 An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Study Poverty Among Working Parents with Regard to State Earned Income Credit.** Sponsors: Rep. Povich (D-Ellsworth) and Sen. Dagget (D-Kennebec) This establishes a State Earned Income Tax Credit of 5% of the federal Earned Income Tax Credit. The credit is non-refundable, which means it does not apply to individuals whose income is too low to pay state taxes. **Status:** Funded in the Budget.

**PL 740: An Act to Establish a Method of Determining Employer Contributions to the Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund.** Sponsor: Sen. Douglass (D-Androscoggin) This puts in place a mechanism to ensure that the Unemployment Insurance Fund will remain solvent during a recession when there is the greatest demand on the UI program. It also requires that whenever



# GIRLS' DAY AT THE CAPITOL

by Melissa MacCrae

The State House opened its doors March 3 to welcome about 30 seventh- and eighth-grade girls from Eagle Lake to Kittery for a day dedicated to them. The consistent message they heard from Senate President Mark Lawrence, Senate Majority Leader Chellie Pingree, Senate Minority Leader Jane Amero, House Speaker Steven Rowe and other lawmakers was that the Legislature needs more women.

About a half-dozen women mentors volunteered to shepherd the students around the Capitol for Girls' Day at the State House, an annual event sponsored by the Women's Development Institute, a nonprofit organization based in Augusta. The girls were met with a cacophony of clanging bells and the rush of lawmakers clamoring down the hallways of the Capitol under construction. Yet they rose to the challenges they encountered throughout the day; their increasing confidence was tangible.

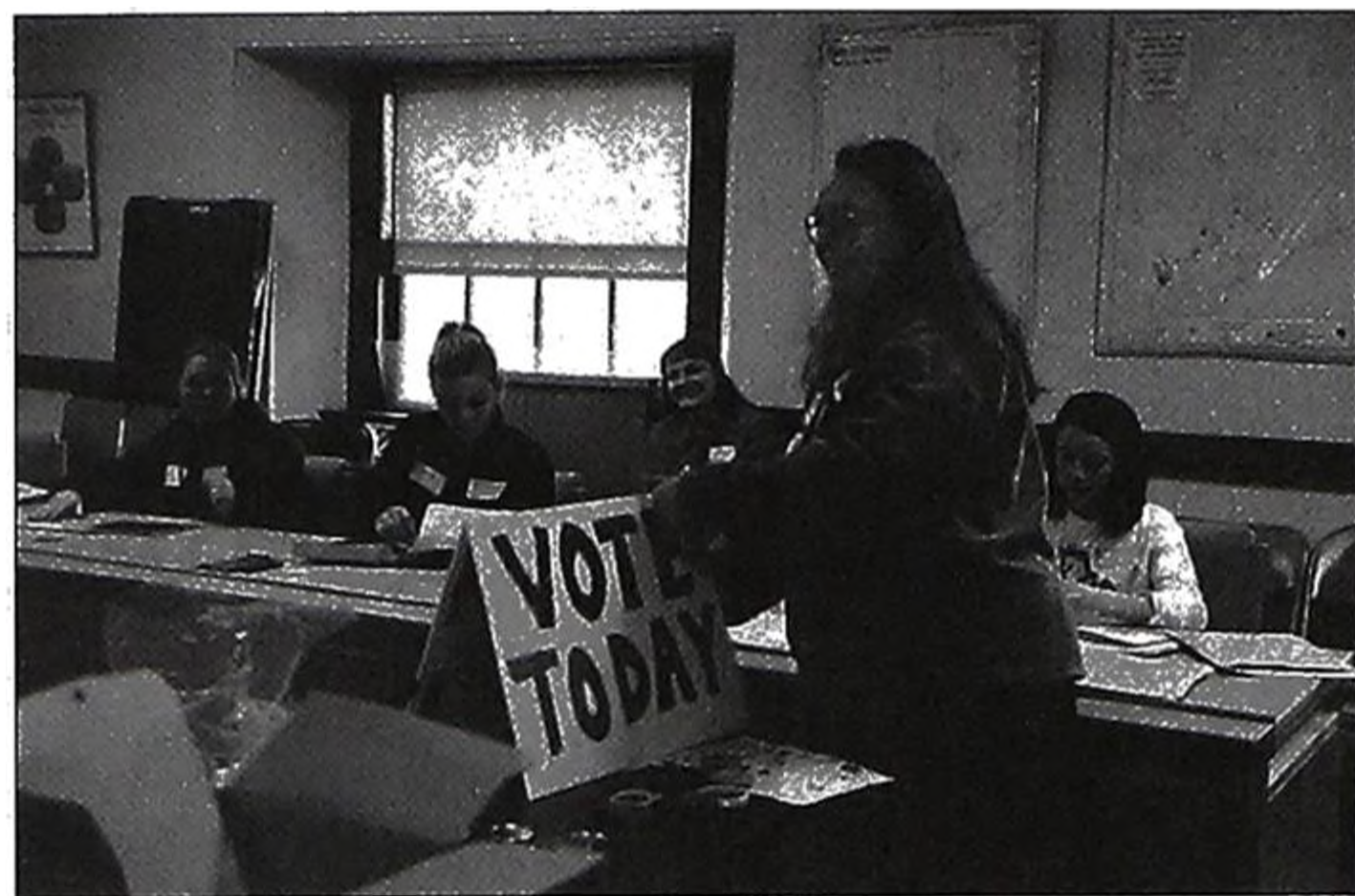
The girls left the adults behind as they acted as pages for state representatives during a live session. They also participated in mock public hearings on the bill that would prohibit the use of the word "squaw" to designate public places. In one group, three participants played the role of lawmaker; three were proponents of 'll, the remaining three were opposed.

Three adult women experienced in lobbying and State House politics coached the girls on their respective roles. Though all the girls admittedly supported the bill, it was testament to their ability to learn and argue the opposing position. In only 20 minutes, and scant coaching, the soon-to-be women took their places and played their parts. Some even devised their own lines and arguments to bolster their testimony.

The breathless morning traipsing up and down the Capitol's marble stairways ended with a chilly walk across the street to the Blaine House for lunch. Gov. King himself made an appearance, touting his proposal to buy laptop computers for all seventh-graders in Maine. He obviously expected a different response than the one he received from pupils who could benefit from his plan.

One by one, about a half-dozen girls, who appeared comfortable sitting cross legged on the floor in the luxurious room decorated with antiques, commented on his proposal, and suggested that the \$50 million he proposed might be better spent on improving their schools. On another timely issue, Miranda, who is on her Farmingdale school's civil rights team, inquired about the tenuous link for that project. Other pupils had questions about the man fingerprinting teachers they knew and trusted.

Though many challenged him, King honored his guests, listened attentively and responded to their concerns. Dressed in casual clothes - some in chunky-heeled shoes - these future voters exhibited poise, maturity and awareness of current affairs.



*Chris Rusnov and Girls' Day participants discuss ways to effectively communicate a message to the public.*

Then it was back the State House, where we were escorted into the then empty House chamber to await Speaker Rowe. The girls were invited to sit in the tall-backed leather chairs, where lawmakers had conducted the state's business only moments before. Rowe smiled broadly as he took his place at the rostrum

overlooking the tiered seating arrangement before him. He encouraged the girls to use the same level of decorum generally used when conducting House business and to address him as Mr. Speaker.

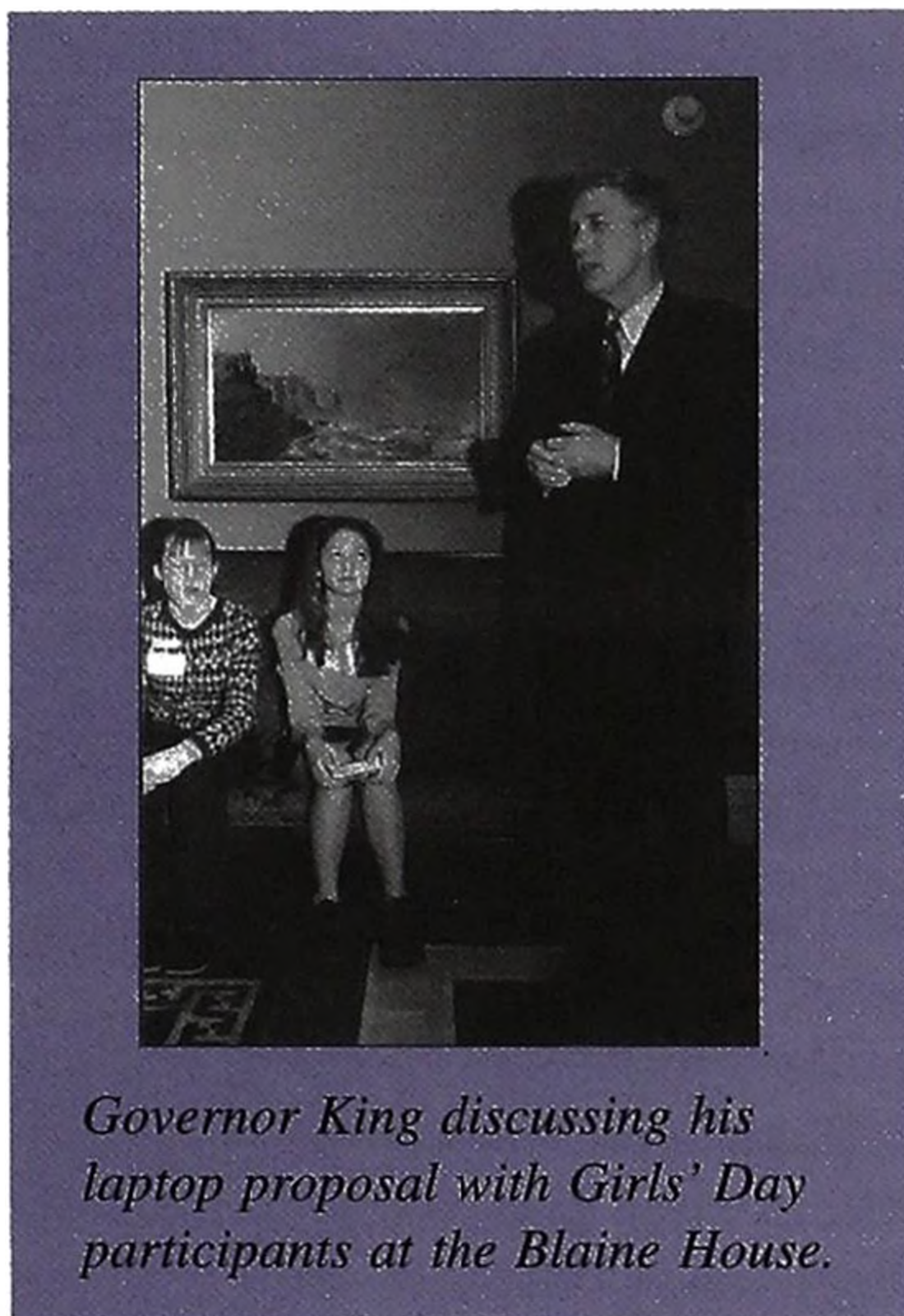
When he was asked, Rowe said he enjoyed the power he earned when he became speaker, but was quick to explain that as speaker, he must shed the mantle of partisanship and be responsive to lawmakers from both parties and the one independent member.

Rowe encouraged those present - as they vied for his attention - to get a good education and return for a career in public service. But perhaps the greatest gift he gave the girls was a heartfelt story about his own daughter Lindsay. Arriving home from school one day, she announced she would run for class representative. When he inquired, she told him that other posts up for election in-

cluded the presidency. But she declined to run because, she said, "Only boys are running." Her father asked, "Why don't you try? You're popular, you get good grades." She promised to consider it. A few weeks passed. Then Rowe received a call while on the rostrum. It was Lindsay. She had been elected class president. Her female classmates hailed her success.

With a lump in my throat, I wondered then how many other girls today hear the words Rowe spoke to his own daughter and to the girls present there. "You can do it. Just try." The day was underscored by the fact that girls and women hunger for more leadership role models. Girls' Day at the State House lasts but a day. But society's investment in girls every day will result in empowering a new generation of women leaders, some of whom one day will become president.

*Note: This article first appeared March 15, 2000, in the Bangor Daily News. Melissa MacCrae is a BDN copy desk editor and a board member with the Maine Women's Lobby.*



*Governor King discussing his laptop proposal with Girls' Day participants at the Blaine House.*