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## The Maine Women's Advocate (2007 - Summer)

Maine Women's Lobby Staff

*Maine Women's Lobby*

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## Maine Women's Policy Center *Breakfast of Champions* To Highlight the Imperative of Family Values

Your job shouldn't tear your family apart. But for too many, balancing work with family needs is an impossible task. Ask for flexibility or for time off and risk losing a job and your economic security. Do nothing, and see time with your family just slipping away.

Americans are waiting for economic policies that recognize that workers have families, policies that acknowledge a changed economy in which both parents working is now the norm.

It's time to make sure economic policies work for all of us. This year's Breakfast of Champions series will bring important family issues to the forefront and make the case for why family friendly public policies should be a political priority.

**If we care about family values, it's time to value families.  
Join the conversation at the Breakfast of Champions!**

**Thursday, October 4, from 7:30-9:00 a.m.**  
**Holiday Inn By the Bay, Portland**

**Wednesday, October 10, from 7:30-9:00 a.m.**  
**Spectacular Event Center, Bangor**

**Thursday, October 11, from 7:30-9:00 a.m.**  
**Northern Maine Community College, Presque Isle**

For more information or sponsorship opportunities, contact Bonnie at 622-0851 or [development@mainewomen.org](mailto:development@mainewomen.org).

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*Legislative Wrap-Up*  
*Inside!*

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The Maine Women's

SUMMER 2007

# ADVOCATE

A publication of the Maine Women's Lobby & Maine Women's Policy Center



## Legislative Wrap-Up

### Maine Women's Lobby Wins Bills to Bolster Women's Economic Security

*Report from Laura Harper, Maine Women's Lobby Director of Public Policy*

By the view from my new second floor office, just across the street from the State House parking lot, there can be no doubt about it – the Legislature has adjourned.

Throughout the legislative session this spring, my only time in the office has been in the very early mornings before the legislative session begins. Between checking e-mails and developing my talking points, I would glance out of the window for a view on how chaotic the State House was likely to be. Today, however, there are many empty spaces, and the cars with legislative plates are nowhere to be found. The school buses are gone. State House staff finally get to park close to the building. Summer is here.

With the relative calm, it's time to assess the results of the first regular session of the 123<sup>rd</sup> Legislature. Clearly, the session had both successes and disappointments for the women of Maine. Ultimately, however, we were pleased by the outcome.

Of the Maine Women's Lobby's top four priority bills, only one was defeated. That bill (L.D. 1309) would have ensured fair and equal access to abortion services for low-income women by providing public funding to those eligible for the state's Medicaid program.

In partnership with the **Maine Choice Coalition**, the Maine Women's Lobby was at the core of the debate. We testified at the public hearing and engaged in dozens of one-on-one conversations with legislators. Unfortunately, this was not the year to win this struggle.

More positively, working families have earned critical protections as a result of two bills recently signed into law. The first (L.D. 375) amends Maine's Family Medical Leave law to include domestic partners. Now domestic

*continued on inside page*

## Girls Take the Lead

### 11th Annual Girls' Day: Resounding Success

On March 22, women were in the majority at the State House.

That's when 100 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls took their seats to vote in the House of Representatives. Of course, the vote wasn't for real, but their enthusiasm and energy was nonetheless palpable!

**Girls' Day at the State House** attracted participants from Addison to Springvale, and, as usual, it was a packed day of activity. The girls debated a real bill which would have



Participants focus on messaging for the mock press conference

required all 6<sup>th</sup> grade girls to receive the vaccine against the human papilloma virus. Demonstrating a clear analysis of the issue, the student legislators elected to amend the bill in committee to remove the mandate and increase education on the need for the vaccine.

For many, it was their first exposure to the legislative process and to the possibility that they could one day run for office and win.



Girls hear testimony at the mock public hearing

Despite the fact that women still make up only 31% of Maine's legislative body, the girls witnessed women's leadership first-hand by hearing from a variety of high-profile elected and appointed women.

Said a Kennebec participant, "Girls' Day has opened my eyes to government, even making me want to pursue a job in government process." Said **Senate President Beth Edmonds**, "For the first time, the entire place was filled with female faces."



All smiles at pick up at the close of Girls' Day

Girls' Day launches students on the road of public life, and we're confident that some will return as future legislators!

continued from front page

partners and the children of a domestic partner will earn the same protections guaranteed others by Family Medical Leave. This law is an important step forward, particularly for gay and lesbian couples seeking the basic protections afforded to married couples under Maine law.

We celebrated the passage of an omnibus bill (L.D. 1884) which made major changes to Maine's unemployment insurance system. This legislation, the result of compromise and consensus among the administration, business leaders, and advocates for working families, establishes a Competitiveness Skills Scholarship fund for low-wage workers seeking higher education and training to upgrade their skills and attain a living-wage job.



Governor Baldacci and Commissioner Fortman enjoy a light moment during the signing of L.D. 1884. Source: Governor's Office

Importantly, this legislation also ends the "sunset" on unemployment insurance benefits for part-time workers – the majority of whom are women – and repeals the Social Security offset for older workers receiving unemployment compensation. By reducing the unemployment insurance trust fund surplus to a smaller but appropriate and sustainable level, the law also provides significant tax breaks to Maine businesses.

This legislation was a result of years of education and advocacy on the importance of providing access to higher education for low-wage workers, and we're particularly proud to have played a role in developing the bill which ultimately won unanimous support in both chambers.

Finally, we're pleased that *An Act to Care for Working Families* (L.D. 1454) was approved for carry-over to the second regular session. Currently, one out of two full-time workers lacks even one paid sick day. This bill would provide a new standard of paid sick days for full- and part-time workers in businesses of 25 or more employees. **Maine Women's Lobby Public Relations and Community Organizer Cara Bilodeau** and I have rolled up our sleeves to lead a major grassroots effort on this issue throughout the summer and fall.

So, don't think that just because the State House campus is quiet that this lobbyist is taking the summer off! I've got my hands full (along with my inbox) and can't wait to get back into the fray in January. Thanks for your help in making this legislative session – the 29<sup>th</sup> in which the Maine Women's Lobby has been engaged – a successful one for women across Maine.

- Laura Harper, Director of Public Policy

## From the Executive Director

### Maine Women's Lobby Gains Ground Inside the State House ... and Out

In the fast and furious final days of legislative session, it's easy to lose track of our gains and accomplishments. The calendar just flies by, and we find ourselves counting legislative advances (and steps back) in hours and even minutes. Now that it's summer time, we finally get a chance to reflect on the session and plan for the months ahead.

As **Public Policy Director Laura Harper** reports in her legislative analysis, we have much to be proud of so far this session. Indeed, several years of work have come to fruition with the enactment of a bill securing a **Competitiveness Skills Scholarship Fund**. Other legislative successes, large and small, are too many to fit on these pages. Please look for the complete wrap-up and check out how your legislators voted in the accompanying insert.



Laura Harper joins the Equal Pay Day celebration by calling upon Maine people to talk about wages

On some bills, the struggle has just begun. That's certainly true for the effort to ensure fair and equal access to abortion services for low-income women. While that issue did not advance this year, we are certain that Maine will ultimately join 17 other states in extending the right to reproductive choice to all women - not just the privileged.

As usual, we took our advocacy outside the Maine Legislature as well. On April 3, 2007, we commemorated **Maine's Equal Pay Day** and called on businesses and women to start talking about wages. When women were dealt yet another blow from the new John Roberts Supreme Court, we joined **Congressman Tom Allen** and **Karin Anderson** to denounce the decision in *Ledbetter v. Goodyear*



Sarah Standiford joins Congressman Allen in denouncing the Supreme Court decision in *Ledbetter*

*Tire & Rubber Co.* The 5-4 decision restricts our ability to use the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 to remedy pay discrimination. In the weeks ahead, we will call upon Maine's U.S. Congressional Delegation to support legislation to redress this decision and also to pass the Paycheck Fairness Act.

As always, thanks for your moral and financial support which enables our advocacy work and adds grassroots power to our call for women's full equality.

- Sarah Standiford, Executive Director

## Meet the Women of the Maine Women's Lobby & Policy Center

### Law Fellow Joins the Summer Team

Each summer, we reflect on the legacy of one of our founders, **Linda Smith Dyer**, as we welcome a new law student with the fellowship which bears Linda's name. Linda Smith Dyer was one of the original founders of the Maine Women's Lobby (in 1978) and set a strong example with her devotion to advocacy for Maine women. That's why we're pleased to introduce advocate **Kimberly Richardson** as our 2007 Linda Smith Dyer Fellow.



Linda Smith Dyer Fellow, Kimberly Richardson

Kimberly finished her first year at the University of Maine School of Law in the top third of her class and is a honors graduate in Sociology and Women and Gender Studies from the College of the Holy Cross. While at Holy Cross, she volunteered as a hotline counselor with a local rape crisis center and performed in the *Vagina Monologues*. Originally from New Hampshire, Kimberly relocated to Portland last year.

During her fellowship, she is researching and developing a series of educational publications describing some of the rights and protections that the Maine Women's Lobby has helped to enact. We hope to have a set of comprehensive and readable summaries on key issues by the end of the summer. Of course, Kim's also hard at work doing all the legal and policy research that we postponed until her arrival!

Also joining the Maine Women's Policy Center this summer is **Emily Crowley**. Originally from Belfast, Emily is a rising senior at Bates College where she is studying Political Science and Chinese. She is serving as a full-time paid intern through the Harvard Center for Community Partnerships. Emily is leading our Pathways to Higher Education project by researching and writing a publication detailing the need for access to higher education and training for adult workers.

Our newest summer intern, **Laura Robitzek**, joins us two days a week as a campaign and research intern working on our paid sick days effort. Laura, an Auburn resident and avid sportswoman, will be a sophomore at Smith College where she is studying French, Philosophy, and Political Science.

Welcome to all! We love having a full house at 124 Sewall Street and are already impressed by the caliber of our new summer staff.

## Thank you to the Sponsors of Girls' Day at the State House!

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Karen Wagner

## Lobby Movin' Up!

### Offices Expand on 124 Sewall Street

If you've ever stopped by our offices across from the State House in Augusta, you know we were overdue for additional space. No more! We've recently expanded into the second floor space on Sewall Street. With a workstation and office space for every employee, the new elbow room is a joy. Thank you for your support which has made this expansion and our work on behalf of Maine women possible.

## Call for Board Volunteers

### Prospective Nominees Solicited for Both Boards

Ever wondered how you can contribute your expertise to our mission of women's equality? If so, board membership may be for you. The nominating committee is soliciting prospective nominees for both the Maine Women's Policy Center and the Maine Women's Lobby Boards of Directors. For more information, call the office at 622-0851 or e-mail your resume to info@mainewomen.org.