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Winter 1-1-2007

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

Maine Women's Lobby Staff

*Maine Women's Lobby*

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# What's at Stake in the 123rd Legislature

## Under the Dome

### Maine Women's Lobby to Advance Ambitious Legislative Agenda

When newly elected members of the Legislature gathered in January, they anticipated considering 2,400 bills. Already, the **Maine Women's Lobby** has flagged over 100 that could have direct impact on the lives of Maine women! Over the next months, we will be working to advance several priority pieces of legislation and defending against restrictions to our rights and liberties. Our ambitious, proactive agenda includes the following initiatives:

#### Economic Opportunity and Development

Guaranteeing paid sick days for Maine workers

Providing equal protection for domestic partners under Maine's Family and Medical Leave Act

Increasing access to higher education and training

Securing unemployment insurance for part-time workers

Fostering economic development for a prosperous future

#### Reproductive Choice

Guaranteeing that low-income women have equal access to reproductive health services

Defending against burdensome and unnecessary abortion restrictions that violate privacy and security

#### Violence Prevention and Intervention

Restoring funds to Maine's critical sexual assault and domestic violence intervention projects

Making battering a crime

#### Fair Tax Reform

Supporting tax reform that provides for fair and targeted relief while providing adequate revenues for investment in our future.

*And that's just the beginning. FMI about our agenda or to get involved, contact **Laura Harper** at 207-622-0851 or [harper@mainewomen.org](mailto:harper@mainewomen.org).*

## All Maine Workers Deserve Paid Sick Days

### Effort Launched to Guarantee Sick Days for All

When you work hard, you should be able to support yourself and your family when illness strikes. And it's no secret that during this time of the year, health officials recommend staying home in order to get better quickly and prevent contagion. Unfortunately, far too many Maine workers risk losing pay or even losing a job when they get sick. In Maine, 41% of workers lack even one paid sick day, and 3 out of 4 working poor families don't have any paid sick days.

The fact is that right now, there is no state or federal law which requires employers to offer paid sick days. It's time for Maine to take the lead in creating 21st century workplaces that promote both productive workers and healthy, secure families.

In Maine and throughout the country, legislation is being introduced that would guarantee a minimum standard of paid sick days. **Representative Jackie Norton** has introduced a new bill called *An Act to Care for Working Families* which would ensure that workers in establishments of 25 or more employees would earn one hour for every 30 hours of work to a maximum of nine days. Where employers have more robust sick day benefits or union contracts, their benefits would not be affected.

The bottom line is that everyone gets sick, but not everyone has the time to get better. And no one should have to come to work sick, lose pay, or even lose a job because of the flu.

Think about it. Have you ever lost a day or more of pay to stay home when you were sick or to care for a sick child? Have you had to go to work even when it put your clients or co-workers at risk? Are you an employer who demands an even playing field, understanding that paid sick days are a basic benefit that everyone should provide? If so, we want to hear from you. E-mail [info@mainewomen.org](mailto:info@mainewomen.org) or call 207-622-0851. **Your personal story can help us make sure no one has to choose between getting better and keeping a job.**

## ***Roe v. Wade's* 34th Commemorated**

### **Reproductive Rights Advocates Celebrate with Action and Remembrance**

On January 22, the **Maine Women's Policy Center** joined with members of the **Maine Choice Coalition** and the **University of Southern Maine Women's Studies Program** to celebrate the 34th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, the U.S. Supreme Court decision that codified a woman's right to determine her reproductive future.

Over 75 people gathered in the University of Southern Maine Glickman Family Library to listen to storytellers speak about their poignant pre-*Roe* experiences in an event called *The Choices We Made and the Connections We Make*.

Said panelist **Joan Williams**, in response to a question about her pre-*Roe* experiences in simply trying to purchase birth control, "Being denied contraception made me so upset. I couldn't believe that the government was interfering with my private decisions."

Storytellers included **Senate President Beth Edmonds**, **Joan Williams**, **Shalom Odokara** and **Dr. Russ De Jong**. They were joined for a call to action by American Civil Liberties Union State Strategies Director **Sondra Goldschein** and moderator **Professor Nancy Gish**.

Maine Choice Coalition co-chairs **Chris Quint** and **Kate Brogan** led participants in a discussion about current efforts to protect and promote women's health and safety at the Maine Legislature.

Earlier that day, Maine Women's Policy Center Community Organizer **Cara Bilodeau** led activists gathered in a "Burma Shave" action in front of passing motorists and pedestrians in Portland. Their effort was a call to action to remember that a woman's right to choose deserves constant protection.



Joan Williams and Shalom Odokara share their perspectives



"Burma Shave" demonstration in Portland

## **Women's Full Employment Equals Maine Prosperity**

### **Maine Women's Policy Center Launches Pathways to Prosperity Project**

When adult low-wage earners have consistent and cohesive pathways to higher education and re-training, Maine's economic future will brighten. That's the premise of a new collaboration between the **Maine Women's Policy Center** and **Maine Equal Justice Partners**. Our goal is to help more Maine families achieve economic security and, in turn, build Maine's workforce for the 21st century.

With generous support from the **John Merck Fund**, the Maine Women's Policy Center will work with educators, workforce development authorities, decision-makers, administrative agencies, businesspeople, and low-wage earners themselves to address this essential question. And we will talk with Maine workers through a series of focus groups and interviews to learn what supports will permit them to enter and succeed in a degree program.

For women in particular, access to higher education is key to economic self-sufficiency, in part because of the persistence of the gender wage gap. Data continues to demonstrate that a woman must have a Bachelor's Degree in order to earn, on average, what a man with a high school degree makes. Compared to men, women also have a higher financial return from education. For example, recent data compiled by the Women's Employment Issues of the Maine Jobs Council demonstrates that women experienced a 66.6% earnings increase from a high school diploma to a Bachelor's Degree, compared to 46.4% for men.

As our economy changes, the need for higher education becomes imperative. Simply put, there is a skills disparity between adult workers and the needs of Maine's emerging, innovative industries. Current Maine workers need higher levels of literacy and technological proficiency to acquire a good job with benefits.

Moreover, business and media reports identify the lack of a skilled workforce as one of the greatest impediments to economic development in our state. Recently, the Brookings Institution issued a well-publicized action plan for sustainable prosperity which identified the training and re-training of Maine's aging workforce as "one of Maine's most pressing problems."

Maine Women's Policy Center will lead the way in confronting this problem by ensuring that women who want to upgrade their skills have every opportunity to make it happen. We will work to empower Maine women to participate in and benefit from a strong Maine economy.

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

*Simmons, Vice-Chair of the Maine Women's Policy Center, Instructor of Sociology and Women's Studies at the University of Southern Maine, and mother of two*

**How did you become involved with the organizations?**

I had moved back to Maine and was separately avoiding my dissertation. My partner, Craig, brought home the Maine Women's Lobby brochure. I had never heard of it even though I grew up here, but I called [then-director] **Laura Fortman** and volunteered. I sat on a State Commission and did some policy analysis. This was really the first time that I was able to combine both practical and intellectual work, and I became so impressed with the accomplishments of the organization. Then I got a job with the Attorney General's office, so I had to stop my involvement for a time. Fast forward a degree and a baby. The Board Chair got my number and called me, and it felt like a really good thing to get involved with again.



Kim Simmons and daughter, Kate

**What inspires you to serve?** I stay involved because I desperately want the world to be different. It is an antidote to despair to work with other people on these causes.

**When you talk about a woman who has inspired you?**

I met my grandmother, Nanna, last fall, and I think about her a lot. She was really important to me; she was 90 when she died, and I just think about the changes that she saw in her lifetime, from women's suffrage to the changes in the 60s and 70s. She was so adaptable and flexible, even during hard times. She had feminist consciousness and resisted sexism and also baked a mean cake! I learned to value caregiving and cooking and the traditional female world and to push men into doing that work more. She was proud to be a feminist in her old age, and I loved that. She was outspoken and encouraged me to be brave.

**What is unique about the organizations?** Our ability to sit at the intersection of different issues and the ability to represent the interests of all kinds of women. There's a way in which the organizations are like my grandmother in that they are visionary and practical organizations. There is a public policy mission that emphasizes social justice and uses collaborative means. And then there is the research, leadership development, and coalition work that acknowledges the differences among us and brings all voices to the table.

## Maine Women's Policy Center is Proud To Offer Choices in Giving

Thanks to your contributions at every level, our work endures. That's why we offer the following options for giving and recognition:

### Leadership Circle

The Leadership Circle of the Maine Women's Policy Center recognizes the commitment of many individuals, organizations, businesses, and families that support our work at the following distinguished levels: \$5,000 Champion, \$2,000 Benefactor, \$1,000 Sustainer, \$500 Advocate, and \$250 Contributor. Your total annual support (of either the Maine Women's Policy Center or the Maine Women's Lobby) will be honored at an annual gathering to celebrate our accomplishments and to learn about the work ahead. Leadership contributions, unless otherwise specified, are also recognized in various publications and on our web site.

### Donations of Stock

In addition to checks and credit cards, we gladly accept donations of stock. Just call our office at 207-622-0851 to arrange a transfer.

### Monthly Giving

We are able to provide you with the convenient option of monthly donation by credit card. There are no renewals to remember, you won't receive solicitation letters during the year, and you can change or cancel your giving at any time. Contact us at 207-622-0851.

### Payroll Deduction

Is it more convenient for you to donate through automatic payroll deduction? The Maine Women's Policy Center is a member organization of MaineShare, a nonprofit that provides funding for 37 organizations throughout Maine. If your employer isn't currently offering this option, find out about signing up at your workplace today by visiting [www.maineshare.org](http://www.maineshare.org).



### iGive.com

Are you looking for a no-cost, fun way to support our work? Join for free at [www.iGive.com/MWPC](http://www.iGive.com/MWPC), then go there every time you shop online. There are nearly 700 nationally known online merchants who will donate a percentage of your purchases to us.



### GoodSearch.com

Visit [www.GoodSearch.com](http://www.GoodSearch.com) for your internet searches. There you'll find a downloadable toolbar, or you can make GoodSearch.com your homepage. Simply type Maine Women's Policy Center into the "I Support" box and click on "Verify" the first time. Then, every time you search, we'll earn a penny. It can add up fast.

Please contact us at 207-622-0851 to discuss these options and, most importantly, thank you for your support!



Hall of Fame Inductee,  
Commissioner Laura Fortman

# Maine Women’s Hall of Fame Celebration Honors Longtime Lobby Leader, Laura Fortman

In March, the 18th Annual Women’s Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony will honor **Laura Fortman**, Commissioner of the Maine Department of Labor and former Executive Director of the Maine Women’s Lobby and Maine Women’s Policy Center, and **Dale McCormick**, Director of the Maine State Housing Authority and founder of Women Unlimited and the Maine Lesbian/Gay Political Alliance. Event sponsor, the Maine Federation of Business and Professional Women, will host a **silver tea and ceremony at 2:00 p.m on March 17 in Jewett Hall at the University of Maine at Augusta**. Contributions will be accepted to augment BPW/Maine’s scholarship program.

“Maine Women’s Lobby members know Laura Fortman as the longtime voice of Maine women and girls,” said **Sarah Standiford**, Executive Director of the Maine Women’s Lobby and Maine Women’s Policy Center, who made the nomination. “Laura has dedicated her adult life to improving the lives of Maine women. Her work has focused on statewide policy change, and her record of accomplishment is great. Each one of us has benefited from Laura’s passion and committment to women’s full equality.” In selecting Laura, sponsors of the award examined the statewide impact of her achievements and assessed the enduring value of her accomplishments. Notable among them is her success in implementing the Maine Equal Pay Law and enacting the landmark Employment Leave for Victims of Violence Law. In her work as Commissioner of the Maine Department of Labor, Laura has similarly used her authority to improve the state’s workforce development system for women and to foster pay equity.

Longtime leader Dale McCormick is also being recognized for her achievements. As the first woman in the country to complete the carpentry apprenticeship with the carpenter’s union in 1975, she put her skills to use helping other women achieve representation in the construction industry. She founded Women Unlimited to provide training for women in non-traditional occupations and founded the Maine Lesbian/Gay Political Alliance, now EqualityMaine, to work to end discrimination in Maine. In 2005, she became Director of the Maine State Housing Authority where she continues to influence access to finance and housing for underserved populations. Congratulations to Dale and Laura for this well-deserved recognition!

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