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## The Maine Women's Advocate (2008 - Summer)

Maine Women's Lobby Staff

*Maine Women's Lobby*

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# ADVOCATE

A PUBLICATION OF MAINE WOMEN'S LOBBY AND MAINE WOMEN'S POLICY CENTER

SUMMER 2008

## THE LEGISLATIVE REPORT: 2007 - 2008

### Under the Dome

#### Primary Legislation for the Maine Women's Lobby

The Maine Women's Lobby achieved many successes with our legislative priorities this past session. An "Act To Amend the Laws Governing Stalking" (L.D. 1873), which updates and clarifies the definition of stalking to better account for technologies used by stalkers, passed without opposition in both the House and the Senate. Other important successes: "An Act To Ensure Fair Wages" (L.D. 1697), which increases the state minimum wage to \$7.25 per hour in 2008 and to \$7.50 per hour in 2009, and "An Act To Ensure the Freedom of Family Child Care Providers To Jointly Negotiate with the State" (L.D. 2095). This legislation grants family child care providers the right to collectively bargain with the state. With the passage of this bill, these providers will become equal players in making the improvements in child care that Maine's families, businesses, and communities need.

Work-family balance continued to be one of the goals of the Maine Women's Lobby this session. "An Act To Amend the Family Medical Leave Laws To Include Siblings" (L.D. 2132) was passed and enacted by the legislature. Family Medical Leave is unpaid, job-protected leave that employees can take after the birth or adoption of a child, in the case of serious illness, or to care for themselves or an immediate family member. This bill allows workers to also care for siblings when financial and living arrangements are shared.

Another necessary bill to help Mainers strike a balance between work and family life, "An Act To Care for Working Families" (L.D. 1454), was narrowly defeated in the House. This bill would have ensured that fewer workers would lose their jobs or have to work through illness, simply because they got sick. Three out of four low-wage workers lack paid sick days. The bill would have provided a minimum number of paid sick days for workers in businesses with 25 or more employees. Its legislative defeat is only a temporary setback for the Maine Women's Lobby's ongoing campaign to ensure that all Maine employees have access to paid sick leave. Next session, the campaign around this important legislation will continue, and we will be asking members to get involved.

In 2008, the Maine Legislature helped to protect children from harmful toxic chemicals. "An Act To Protect Children's Health and the Environment from Toxic Chemicals in Toys and Children's Products" (L.D. 2048) requires Maine to adopt a list of priority chemicals of high concern, requires manufacturers to disclose the toxic chemicals they add to products, and authorizes the state to require safer alternatives. The presence of many of these chemicals in our products has been identified as harmful to women's reproductive health and fertility.

The Maine Choice Coalition, of which the Maine Women's Lobby is a member, believes that Maine law appropriately supports the health and safety of young women by allowing minors to access family planning services without parental consent. The Coalition was successful in narrowly defeating a "Joint Order Directing the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services To Report Out, to the Senate, a Bill Regarding Parental Consent To Dispense Prescription Drugs to Children" (S.P. 842), but the attempt to introduce this legislation represents a warning that parental consent for birth control will be back again during the next session.

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Maine Women's Lobby Director of Public Policy, Laura Harper, (left) and other members of the Alliance for a Clean and Healthy Maine, listen as Representative Hannah Pingree speaks during the signing of L.D. 2048.

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The Maine Women's Lobby joined forces with another dynamic and successful coalition this session. The 140-member-strong Maine Can Do Better Coalition came together to fight the harmful cuts proposed in the Governor's supplemental budget, including proposals to eliminate or severely reduce state funding for domestic violence, sexual assault, family planning, and health care services. Due in large part to the successful actions of the Maine Can Do Better campaign, including the largest State House rally in at least 40 years, many of the harmful cuts were restored in the final budget.

The legislature passed the "Joint Resolution in Support of the Recommendations of the Commission To Develop Strategies To Increase Postsecondary Access, Retention and Completion for Low-Wage, Low-Skilled Adults" (H.P. 1678). With this resolution, the Governor's Workforce Cabinet is being asked to consider the Commission's recommendations and develop a system of measurement and accountability to track the progress in the number of low-wage, low-skilled adults who attain postsecondary education. Having lobbied last session for the establishment of this Commission, and with Sarah Standiford, our Executive Director, serving on the Commission, the Maine Women's Lobby once again worked to advance educational opportunities for workers seeking training and skills towards a more prosperous living. *For a complete wrap-up and to see how your legislators voted on these issues, check out the insert in this newsletter.*

## Paid Sick Days Update

### Maine Women's Lobby Launches Civic Engagement

In Maine, we all want to be able to take care of ourselves and our families when health issues arise. We believe that no one should have to choose between their own health, or the health of a loved one, and their job. But, nearly one out of every two full-time workers in Maine lacks a single paid sick day. That number rises to three out of four for the working poor. The sectors least likely to have any paid sick time are those in child care, nursing home care, food service, and accommodations. See a trend here? These occupations are most often filled by women, offer low wages, and even trend towards being part time instead of full time. Talk about a women's issue – paid sick days are a must for working mothers, caregivers, and every worker in Maine. It's just common sense and common decency.

Everyone gets sick; everyone should be able to afford to get well. Why then did we see L.D. 1454, "An Act To Care for Working Families," fail in the 123<sup>rd</sup> Legislature? This bill, sponsored by Rep. Jackie Norton (D-Bangor), would have provided one hour of paid sick time for every 30 hours worked at establishments with 25 or more employees. For full-time workers, that would have been nine days a year to use to care for themselves or a close family member when illness strikes.

What happened? Despite a robust and overwhelmingly supportive public hearing before the Labor Committee, months of direct lobbying by our lobbyist and key coalition partners, countless phone calls and e-mails from activists all across the state, and an edgy media campaign including opinion editorials, letters to the editor, print ads, and two web sites, we weren't able to counteract our opponents' fear tactics. Just shy of ten votes needed to pass the bill in the House, legislators still didn't believe that their constituents were behind this bill. Lobbied relentlessly by a host of business and industry lobbyists, the majority of legislators refused to stand up for this basic and necessary workplace standard. But, we know that Maine people do support earned sick days—and that it is the right step for Maine's economic future.

This summer and fall, we're moving into civic engagement. During an exciting election season, the Maine Women's Lobby will be organizing women in communities across the state. We're producing a dynamic policy guide for candidates about work and family issues. We're activating women to make the case for paid sick days with their candidates for state office. By phone, e-mail, and during sit-down meetings, our members will share their stories about balancing work and family responsibilities in Maine. With the policy guide in hand, candidates will get a strong dose of what their voters want—family friendly workplace standards—which are long overdue.

## From the Executive Director

### Sarah Standiford



Thirty years ago, Linda Smith Dyer's passionate advocacy for women's rights launched a statewide effort to guarantee that women were influencing the policy decisions that affect their lives. Now, her vision endures through the ongoing work of the Maine Women's Lobby and through the Linda Smith Dyer Fellowship, established in 2002.

Linda was an attorney, advocate, and leader. Her experience included serving in Governor King's Administration, practicing law in Augusta, and lobbying at the State House. Linda has a special place in Maine as one of the founders of the Maine Women's Lobby in 1978. Our 30th anniversary year marks a major effort to fully fund the Fellowship's endowment.

The Linda Smith Dyer Fellowship provides for a University of Maine School of Law student to continue Linda's strong example of public policy work. (See Elyse Wilkinson article, page 3.) Fellows provide research, advanced analysis, and sophisticated public policy development on issues related to women and girls—critical support for the Maine Women's Policy Center.

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The Maine Women's Policy Center has established a fund at the Maine Community Foundation and is raising \$275,000 to fully endow this Fellowship. With your support, the organization will expand the scope and influence of the Fellowship and create new opportunities for legal research and analysis on issues related to women and girls.

Thanks to the nearly 100 people who have already pledged to this campaign, we are very close to our goal. With just \$30,000 left to raise, every contribution is critical.

For information about making a tax-deductible donation for the Fellowship, call 207.622.0851 or e-mail [info@mainewomen.org](mailto:info@mainewomen.org). We thank you for helping us pay tribute to Linda's legacy by working to secure her vision for women in the future.

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## Are You Receiving Our Electronic Communications?

As the amount of spam being sent to us each day increases, so do those powerful spam filters! This is often a good thing, but not if it's blocking your connection to Maine Women Online. Have you been receiving our monthly e-newsletter and action alerts? If you haven't, they may be getting trapped in your spam filter.

There are a couple of different ways to solve this problem. First, it may be as simple as adding [mainewomenonline@mainewomen.org](mailto:mainewomenonline@mainewomen.org) to your allowed list. If that doesn't work, you may want to use an alternate e-mail address. Simply e-mail us at [info@mainewomen.org](mailto:info@mainewomen.org) with that change.

*If you are not currently receiving our e-updates and would like to, please e-mail us at [info@mainewomen.org](mailto:info@mainewomen.org).*

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## 30 Years and 30 House Meetings: Help Us Reach Our Goal!

As part of the Maine Women's Lobby's 30-year anniversary celebration, we set a goal to host 30 house meetings across the state. The purpose of these meetings is simple: to increase our membership numbers—and our power. Thanks to all of you who have already contacted us about hosting a house meeting. At this point, we have 27 meetings in the works all around the state! Won't you help us reach our goal of 30 meetings? We are still looking for locations in southernmost Maine, western Maine, and up in the County.

House meetings are an easy way for you to share your enthusiasm for the Maine Women's Lobby's work with your friends, acquaintances, and colleagues—and an important way for us to reach out to new members.

E-mail us at [info@mainewomen.org](mailto:info@mainewomen.org) if you would like to host a house meeting. Our goal is to connect with folks from all across the state—no party is too small—so, contact us today!

# Meet the Women

of the Maine Women's Lobby and the Maine Women's Policy Center

## LINDA SMITH DYER FELLOW ELYSE WILKINSON



Elyse Wilkinson is a law student at the University of Maine School of Law in Portland. As the Linda Smith Dyer Fellow, Elyse is responsible for research and strategic development of the Maine Women's Policy

Center's public policy initiatives on such issues as equal pay, family caregiver discrimination, and paid family and medical leave insurance.

"I was inspired to apply for the fellowship to pursue my interest in legal services for underrepresented groups, particularly legal advocacy for immigrants and civil rights," said Elyse. "It's exciting to have the opportunity to apply my research skills to develop new public policies which will make a difference in the lives of Maine women."

Elyse has been interested in the nonprofit sector for as long as she can remember. She states of her decision to go to law school, "I feel very fortunate that I can pursue an advanced degree. I chose law school because I see it as a great way to make a difference. The legal system is impossible to navigate for so many people. Attaining a law degree means that I can help people—and nonprofit organizations—in a different way."

Elyse grew up in Saco, Maine and has lived in Portland for two years. She hopes to apply her law degree to better help people in need of legal services such as immigrants and the GLBT community. While in college at the University of Maine at Farmington, Elyse volunteered at the Abused Women's Advocacy Program and worked with Bowdoin's Upward Bound program for two summers. She is a current member of the GLBT law caucus.

She says, "I think of myself as an activist, especially environmentally. I am crazy about recycling, composting, and being "green," and I've been a vegetarian for most of my life. In addition to always being drawn towards the work of nonprofit organizations, I love to cook and eat. I also enjoy fermenting things in my kitchen like sauerkraut and beer."

The Linda Smith Dyer Fellowship was founded in 2002 by the Maine Women's Policy Center, the Maine Women's Lobby, the University of Maine School of Law, and Linda's family to honor Linda's devotion to the public interest and to honor her skill in public policy. The Linda Smith Dyer Fellowship provides for a ten-week summer public interest fellowship for a student from the University of Maine School of Law.

SEPTEMBER 18, 2008

## 30TH ANNIVERSARY GALA

Portland Marriott at Sable Oaks  
South Portland, Maine

### Celebrating our Past, Creating our Future

If you haven't already heard, we're putting together a little celebration for our 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary ... just the women of the Maine Women's Lobby, comedienne Karen Morgan, emcee Lori Voornas, and a few hundred of our closest friends.

For folks on our mailing list, check your mailboxes. Not on our list yet? No problem – just contact us at [info@mainewomen.org](mailto:info@mainewomen.org) or 207.622.0851, and we'll be glad to send you an invitation.

Join us for a celebratory evening of good food, laughter, networking, and much more: **Thursday, September 18, 2008, from 6:00 – 9:00 p.m. at the Portland Marriott at Sable Oaks in South Portland, Maine.**

Linda Smith Dyer Fellow, Elyse Wilkinson, (right) and Maine Women's Lobby intern, Anne Sheldon, (center) provide membership information at our free July concert in the park in Yarmouth.

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

Maine Women's Lobby



P.O. Box 15  
Hallowell, Maine 04347  
[www.mainewomen.org](http://www.mainewomen.org)



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