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The Maine Women's

SUMMER 2001

ADVOCATE

Number 32



Laura Fortman (right) and Senator Beth Edmonds (left).



Scores of supporters turned out to show their support for L.D. 524.



a publication of the
**MAINE
WOMEN'S
LOBBY**
and the
**WOMEN'S
DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE**

THIS TIME, THE MAINE WOMEN'S LOBBY WAS READY!

Funding for programs to prevent violence against women secured in the eleventh hour

As the debate over the state budget intensified in the final weeks of the legislative session it appeared that funding for one of our policy priorities, L.D. 524: An Act to Fund Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Intervention and Prevention Programs, would not be included in the budget. L.D. 524 would provide vital support for direct services for victims, school-based prevention work, community safety, and infrastructure for agencies that serve victims and work to prevent violence. Although 144 members of the House and the Senate signed on to L.D. 524 when it was introduced in February, by early June support appeared to be softening as scores of bills competed for extremely limited resources in the state budget.

For longtime activists and those familiar with the history of the Maine Women's Lobby, it was a familiar situation. Twenty-three years ago the first bill to fund battered women's projects was introduced and received initial widespread support. But in the final hours of the 1978 legislative session, the bill died on the Appropriations table because no one was there to advocate for it.

The Maine Women's Lobby was founded that year to prevent that devastating loss from happening again. This spring, the apparent lack of funding for L.D. 524 provided us with an opportunity to ensure that history did not repeat itself.

On Thursday, June 7, the Maine Women's Lobby, the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault, the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence and other advocates organized a vigil on the steps of the State House to demonstrate the depth and breadth

of support for funding L.D. 524. In response to our email alerts, phone calls, and flyers, more than 100 supporters from across the state drove to Augusta on 48 hours notice to send the message that preventing sexual assault and domestic violence should be a top priority for Maine policymakers.

Joining advocates and supporters were a number of legislators who provided crucial leadership on L.D. 524, including bill sponsor and House Majority Leader Pat Colwell, Speaker of the House Michael Saxl, Senator Mary Cathcart, Senator Beth Edmonds, Senator Mike McAlevey, Assistant House Majority Leader Bill Norbert, Rep. Deb Simpson, Rep. Ben Dudley, Senator Mary Small, Senator Sharon Treat and others.

Domestic violence and sexual assault are the only crimes on the increase in Maine, and Maine is sixth in the country in the rate of domestic violence related homicides. As Laura Fortman, Executive Director of the Maine Women's Lobby said, "In the past, people have given lip service to funding prevention efforts and victim services, but when it came time to put money behind the effort, the money wasn't there. This time, we're here, we're watching, and we're organizing."

Continued - see "Funding for Violence Prevention" on page 2

**Inside
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issue**

- **Legislative Summary**
- **Breakfast of Champions**
- **Raffle Winners!**

The debate over state budget allocations continued and so did the vigil and our advocacy efforts. For two weeks, supporters of L.D. 524 staffed a table in the Hall of Flags while the legislature was in session. Meanwhile, Laura Fortman and other advocates participated in extensive negotiations and lobbied legislators to secure funding for the bill.

At 4 a.m. on June 15, weeks of long hours, daily organizing efforts, and months of difficult negotiations paid off. The Appropriations Committee finally closed the budget with \$1.2 million in year 1 and \$3.0 million in year 2 included for L.D. 524. The budget was approved by a majority of the House and the Senate in the closing hours of the legislative session.

In a year when state funds were severely limited, this is a tre-

mendous victory for Maine women. During the final weeks of the session, more than six ideas for funding L.D. 524 were proposed. It took the groundswell of support demonstrated at the vigil - and the continued, tireless advocacy of the Lobby and other advocates - to generate enough support for funding to be included in the general budget and for the budget to pass both the House and the Senate.

Our victory affirmed what the founders of the Maine Women's Lobby determined in 1978: that a full-time presence is needed at the State House to ensure that the priorities of Maine women are paramount to public policy debates in our state. It also affirmed the power of citizen involvement in the policy-making process. A heartfelt thank you for your phone calls, letters, and emails in support of this bill. Your activism has made a real difference in helping us come closer to breaking the cycle of violence against women in Maine.

MWL & WDI THEN AND NOW

Returning intern Shay Bellas reflects on change

by Carol Clapp

Returning intern Shay Bellas was barely through the door when a Lobby colleague showed up looking anxious. The women chatted and waited for Laura Fortman to get off the phone. By the time the executive director became available, a strategy had developed.

"So, you've been away at law school?" asked Chris Hastedt, of Maine Equal Justice Partners. "And, you're back here as an intern? How lucky for us! I have this question about unemployment insurance."

In the end, Shay spent the day on the Internet and phone contacting every Department of Labor in the nation. She nailed one call after another, being transferred, leaving messages, but mostly getting the details we needed about policies in each state. Her urgent enthusiastic tone got results and livened the day for office staff on both ends of the line.

That was her first day back after a three-year absence. On the second day, she shadowed lobbyist Fortman at the State House as debate heightened in the final hours of passing Maine's \$5.4 billion 2002-2003 general fund budget. On the third day, Shay helped coordinate a candlelight vigil to support legislation to fund domestic violence and sexual assault prevention and intervention programs. And on the fourth day, she found out she was pregnant.

"This is turning out to be quite a summer!" Shay said after being interviewed by a TV reporter at the vigil. "It's great to be back and see how the Lobby is coming of age." She looked around at the crowd of about 100 people on the State House steps. "It's amazing, really, how far we've come in speaking up for women in Maine."

Asked if being pregnant has changed any of her opinions about pro-choice initiatives, Shay said: "Absolutely! I'm even more pro-choice than I was before. I can't imagine what this would be

like if I didn't have the support of an amazing husband and an excellent family, plus the 25 girl friends who are here holding my hand. I can't imagine being forced to have a baby while knowing that I didn't have a choice."

After receiving a Bachelor's degree from USM, majoring in political science (no surprise there!), Shay enrolled at Vermont Law School in South Royalton, where she studies her "passion:" Environmental Law. She says it is no coincidence that the majority of Superfund sites in this country and in Maine are in the poorest communities. "The poor are targeted because they have to be more concerned with feeding their children than finding out what is in the soil where they put their child's sand box, or why the river where they picnic has a strange odor," she said.

Lobby Director Laura Fortman was identified as a strong role model in advocating for women. She recalled a scene from her intern days when Laura was talking with someone Shay didn't like.

"I remember looking over at Laura with the eyes and inexperience of a 21-year-old and thinking: 'How can you be discussing this with HIM? He's the enemy!' And Laura smiled at me in her wise way and said, 'Not on all things'. That's when I realized that the only way to mend political wounds in this state is by looking to the things we agree on and can work on together, and not what we disagree about."

"So," Shay continued, "While some at The Lobby may think the environment is not a 'women's issue,' I think I have found a way to show that it is. Now, we must all come together to protect the most sacred mother of all: Mother Earth."

Shay has been experiencing morning sickness, not feeling well enough to volunteer lately. But she knows this will pass. "I'm eager to become one of those glowing pregnant women!" She is considering taking a couple years off to enjoy family life. And, hopefully, to continue volunteering at The Lobby.



Shay Bellas being interviewed by a reporter at the vigil.

POLICY SPOTLIGHT

closer look at some of the issues we worked on this session - and what impact they will have on you

Our legislative wrap-up (insert) provides a summary of the outcomes of several dozen bills we were tracking. Below are overviews of several issues that were priorities for us, and what they mean for you and your family.

Expanding Access to Health Care

Access to quality and affordable health care is consistently a top concern for Women's Lobby members and women who participate in our leadership development programs. After a tremendous amount of organizing and advocacy by the Maine Women's Lobby, the Maine Equal Justice Project, the Alliance for Healthy Maine, and other groups, L.D. 1303 An Act to Increase Access to Health Care (Sponsor: Speaker Saxl, D-Portland) was passed in the final hours of the session. This new law expands Medicaid coverage to nearly 16,000 adults with incomes below the poverty level. These are adults who were not previously covered by Medicaid because they have no minor children living at home and are not disabled or elderly, yet who were not able to afford private insurance and whose jobs most likely do not provide insurance benefits.

In addition, this new law raises the asset limit for Medicaid eligibility from around \$2,000 to \$8,000 for an individual and \$10,000 for a family. Under these new rules, families that have small but essential assets - a second car for work or a small pension from a previous job - will not be disqualified from receiving Medicaid if their incomes are within the eligibility guidelines.

The bill was funded by a six cent increase in the cigarette tax. This new law will go into effect in October of 2002.

Making Family and Medical Leave Affordable for Maine Workers

Because of the unique power-sharing arrangement in the Senate, Study Committees were funded in a different manner this year. Along with other studies, L.D. 1466, Resolve, to Study the Benefits and Costs for Increasing Access to Family and Medical Leave for Maine Families, was killed, by agreement, in the Senate and replaced by joint order (H.P. 1386) in the House. Appointments to the study committee will be made by the Senate President and the Speaker of the House.

The study commission H.P. 1386 creates will explore whether leave provided under Maine law is meeting the economic and health care needs of Maine families. It will examine whether or not Maine's current law is meeting the needs of our state's workers and employers; the costs and benefits of providing paid leave; potential wage replacement funding mechanisms. The commission, which will convene this fall, provides a forum for stakeholders from a range of constituencies to determine, collectively, if providing paid family leave benefits is feasible and beneficial to Maine workers and their employers.

Current Maine law allows employees in workplaces with 15

or more employees to take up to 12 weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave to care for their new babies and sick family members, and to recover from their own serious illnesses. As family and work patterns have shifted in Maine and across the country, the need that leave has become more important. Historically, women have shouldered the burden of caring for sick children or elderly parents. Today, many more women are in the workforce. Yet many families cannot afford to go without a paycheck when their a sick family member needs them the most.

Funding for Violence Intervention and Prevention Programs

For the last 20 years, the Maine Women's Lobby has worked to protect women against violence in our homes, relationships, communities and workplaces. To continue keeping these places safe it is vital that funding be provided for intervention and prevention programs. L.D 524 represented the first significant infusion of state funding into services and prevention for violence against women since 1986, yet sexual assault and domestic violence are the only crimes on the increase in Maine.

After months of difficult negotiations, a majority of the House and the Senate voted to include \$1.2 million in year 1 of the budget and \$3 million in year 2 for domestic violence and sexual assault prevention and intervention programs. That funding will go towards:

- Direct services and resources for victims;
- School-based prevention work;
- Community safety, outreach and work with local law enforcement coordinate community response to violence;
- Infrastructure support and capital needs for agencies that serve victims and work to prevent violence.

Continued Access to Full Reproductive Health Services

A slate of anti-choice initiatives are introduced each legislative session, and this year was no different. At the start of the session, we spent hours reading through the fine print on nearly forty anti-choice bills that represented attempts to restrict women's options, create unnecessary medical risks, and make it more difficult for doctors to provide abortion services. Some were familiar, others new. Several of the bills were identical or more extreme versions of the abortion ban defeated by voters in 1999. These bills removed the exception that protect a woman's health as a valid reason for having an abortion; prohibited doctors from choosing the most appropriate and safe method of abortion; or threatened to impose criminal penalties on physicians who perform and abortion at or beyond twenty weeks. Another bill would have made abortion more difficult to obtain by imposing excessive and burdensome regulations on facilities that provide abortions.

All of these bills were defeated after vigilant advocacy by the Women's Lobby and our allies in the Maine Choice Coalition, and with a strong show of pro-choice support at the March public hearing.

Thank you speaking out on these issues!

YOUR MEMBERSHIP DOLLARS AT WORK

As a supporter of the Maine Women's Lobby, you're probably familiar with the membership appeals you receive from us three times a year asking for your financial support. But you may not know why we regularly ask for that support or how we put those funds to use. Here's a bit of insight into how vital your contributions are and why we count on your continued involvement.

The Maine Women's Lobby is a nonprofit 501c(4) organization. Since the Lobby is engaged in direct lobbying activities, contributions are not tax-deductible under IRS regulations. That means the Lobby isn't eligible for foundation grants or other sizeable contributions that most foundations or corporations and many major donors count on a tax-deduction for. MWL receives no state or United Way funding. Except for a small percentage of funding that can be provided by our sister organization, the Women's Development Institute, our funds must be raised through individual membership contributions.

Your contributions are the lifeblood of our advocacy efforts at the State House. Without them, we simply would not be able to provide the express and direct advocacy that is needed on legislation that has an impact on women. Our 501c(4) status also allows us participate in referenda activities (such as 1999's abortion ban referendum) and to mobilize members on political campaigns. While our primary focus right now is on legislation, last fall we notified members in several districts of opportunities to volunteer for or contribute to pro-choice candidates who were running against anti-choice opponents. As our resources and membership grow, so does our capacity to make sure that women's priorities are heard during the electoral process as well as after our state leaders take office and begin to shape public policy.

The Women's Development Institute, the Lobby's sister organization, is a 501c(3) organization that focuses on leadership development, research, outreach and education. Since WDI does not participate in direct lobbying, contributions are tax-deductible and WDI is eligible for foundation grants to support its work. Like the Lobby, though, WDI receives no state or United Way funding. Both organizations start their fiscal years with no guaranteed funding other than what we raise ourselves.

That's why we're always asking for your generous and ongoing support. Without it, we simply would not be able to ensure that the voices and needs of Maine women are represented throughout our state's policymaking process! For a shining example of your membership dollars at work, see our article on the victory on securing funding for domestic violence and sexual assault prevention efforts.

SAVE THE DATE

September 30, 2001: The third annual Northern New England **Multigenerational Women's Conference** will be held on Sunday, September 30 at Dartmouth College in Hanover, NH from 9:00AM - 4:00 PM. Along with the **Maine Women's Lobby**, the conference will be hosted by organizations in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine. The theme of this year's conference is Advocacy. The conference will bring together women of all generations to learn

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SAVE THE DATE FOR OUR

BREAKFAST OF CHAMPIONS SERIES!

Our Breakfasts are our premier annual events and one of the most exciting forums to learn about current trends and issues on the horizon for Maine women. In the past several years, the program has grown from a Breakfast in one location to three events that span the state. This year, we anticipate that over 400 people will participate, including legislators, business leaders, representatives from women's organizations, and local community members. We hope you will join us for the Breakfast in your area!

The theme of this year's series will be "Women in the Workplace." Women's concerns about their rights and equality at work are shaping an innovative policy agenda both in Maine and across the nation. A panel of thought-provoking speakers will spotlight a range of workplace issues, cutting-edge policy solutions for working women's concerns, and issues on the horizon for women at work. State legislators from each area will discuss recent policy initiatives that will have an impact on women's experience in the workplace.

The Breakfast series will kick-off in Portland and conclude in Presque Isle. All events will begin at 7:30 a.m. and conclude by 9 a.m. Please mark your calendar with the event closest to you:

- ★ **September 19:** the Portland Marriott at Sable Oaks
- ★ **September 20:** Sheraton Four Points, Bangor airport
- ★ **September 21:** University of Maine at Presque Isle

Invitations will be mailed in late August. We hope you will join us for another lively event and chance to connect with old and new friends!

from each other how to effect change. FMI, contact LEAD International at lead@sover.net or (802)223-6299.

October 6: The Maine Women's Lobby and Women's Development Institute's **Annual Meeting, 6 PM - 8:30 PM**. All members are encouraged to attend to meet new Board members and staff. FMI, call the office at 622-0851.

October 26: The Maine Women's Fund **Evening to Honor Maine Women and Girls**. Call the Maine Women's Fund at 774-5513 to find out more about this exciting annual event!

November 30: The World Economy: Women and Girls in High Tech. Sponsored by the Women's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Labor, this conference features workshops on girls and women in high technology and emerging trends in high tech disciplines and careers. The event will be held in Washington, D.C. FMI, call (703) 807-2281 or email symposiumwb@aol.com.

GOOD LUCK, LIZ!

Much to our sorrow, Liz Keith is leaving her post as Director of Development and Communications to pursue other opportunities. Hired initially as a part-time administrative assistant, Liz's variety of solid skills has allowed her to shift positions to meet the ever changing needs of our expanding organizations. Her intimate knowledge of every aspect of the organizations and her understanding of underlying political currents will be sorely missed - not to mention her genuine grace and winning smile!

For more than three years, Liz has written grant proposals, coordinated Lobby/WDI events, organized volunteers for the No on 1 Campaign, served as co-chair of the Choice Coalition and groomed this newsletter to its current fine state. She has done everything from developing and executing fundraising strategies to compiling guest lists, cash-flow charts and databases. Her calming presence has provided reassurance and guidance for numerous interns. Liz is an excellent face-to-face communicator, superior writer and wonderful colleague.

The Board and staff hope you join us in wishing her well as she embarks on her new ventures.

NEWSLETTER GETS A NEW NAME!

Look for other small innovations in the months ahead

Notice anything different about this newsletter? It has a new name! As of this issue, we've changed the name from "The Lobbyist" to "The Maine Women's Advocate" to reflect the true breadth of our work. While our lobbying activities at the State House will always be the cornerstone of our mission, we bring that same tenacity and vigilance to our leadership development, outreach, education and research. And by adding the words "Maine Women's," we're even more outspoken about who it is we're advocating for - you and other women across the state.

In the coming months we'll be making other improvements to our look and our materials. Stay tuned!

RAFFLE SENDS FOUR ON GREAT ESCAPES

This year's "Great Escapes" raffle awarded four terrific prizes and once again raised crucial funding towards the Lobby's efforts over the summer. Winners will enjoy "Great Escapes" ranging from Sugarloaf to Manhattan. Congratulations to winners Lillian Pease, Judy Chamberlain, Joan Amory and Patti Mikkewen!

Our thanks to everyone who took a shot at winning and to the Bethel Inn, Barbee and Drew Gilman, Stephanie and Peter Clifford, and Carla Perkins for contributing generous prizes. The raffle raised nearly \$3,000 for MWL activities this summer. Your support is greatly appreciated!

THE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

ACTION COALITION

A Collaborative Effort of Maine Women's Organizations

In 1983, Maine Women's Lobby Executive Director Betsy Sweet recognized the power of combining the technical policy development know-how of the Lobby with the extensive grassroots networks of statewide women's organizations and formed the Women's Legislative Agenda Coalition (WLAC). Betsy was so committed to maintaining WLAC that she took it with her to the Commission on the Status of Women when she was hired by the state. Unfortunately, the Commission was defunded in the early 1990's and the strength of WLAC has ebbed and flowed since then.

In March, the Women's Development Institute convened a meeting to explore the idea of reinvigorating and formalizing that coalition again as the Women's Leadership Action Coalition. The mission of WLAC, a coalition of progressive organizations, is to work toward improving the social, economic and political status of women and promoting the equality of all Maine citizens. Twenty-three women attended that meeting and the energy to revitalize WLAC was overwhelming. The need for a unified - and amplified - voice for women, staffed by the Lobby and WDI, was affirmed resoundingly.

While the Institute has often served as a bridge between different constituencies of grassroots women and facilitated conversations between women's groups, WLAC provides a formal venue for this type of collaboration to take place. With issues like affordable health care, economic security, funding for domestic violence and sexual assault programs - issues that have a profound effect on the well-being of Maine women - being debated by policymakers, having a forum for women's groups from across the state to network, strategize, and share expertise is more important than ever. WLAC, coordinated by the Lobby and WDI, will help discussions and action around these and other issues permeate the women's community in Maine, and the many constituencies that member organizations represent.

The structure of the coalition, specific activities, and the obligations of member groups will be refined further by a working group in the months ahead. In the meantime, we're excited about WLAC's potential to amplify the concerns of women's groups in Maine and by WDI's role in coordinating the Coalition. We'll keep you posted as things progress!

email *Join our email action network!*

Because so many legislative issues demand immediate action, we use weekly email alerts to keep our members posted about urgent policy issues during the legislative session. Throughout the rest of the year, we send occasional news and event announcements that we think will be of interest to our members. Signing up is easy! Just email us at MwomenL@andersonmaine.com and write "subscribe" in the text of the message!

ABOUT THE MAINE WOMEN'S LOBBY AND WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE

The Maine Women's Lobby and the Women's Development Institute work in partnership in optimizing the lives of Maine women and girls through public policy development and legislative action.

MWL (founded in 1978) is a statewide nonpartisan, nonprofit membership organization. Annual membership dues are \$35. However, MWL is committed to representing women of all economic means and any contribution you are able to make entitles you to membership. Because the Lobby is engaged in lobbying activities, contributions are not tax-deductible.

WDI (founded in 1990) is a non-lobbying organization focusing on public outreach, education, leadership development, and research. Contributions are welcome and are tax-deductible.

This newsletter is published jointly by MWL and WDI quarterly. MWL also produces printed and email legislative alerts during the legislative session. If you would like to receive email alerts, please email us at MWomenL@aol.com and write "subscribe to email alert" in the body of the message.

Staff: Laura Fortman, Executive Director; Liz Keith, Director of Development and Communications; Carol Clapp, Administrative Assistant.

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