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Maine Women's Lobby

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The MAINE WOMEN'S ADVOCATE

WINTER 2004

Number 36



a publication of the
**MAINE
WOMEN'S
LOBBY**

and the
**MAINE
WOMEN'S
POLICY
CENTER**

121ST LEGISLATURE RECONSIDERS

CRITICAL PROGRAMS AFFECTING WOMEN

On January 7, 2004, the Second Session of the 121st Legislature began with a whirlwind of political activity. Of note are the many agenda items still left to tackle from last year's session including the anticipated enactment of Dirigo Health, property tax relief, and the merging of the Bureau of Behavioral and Developmental Services (BDS) and Department of Human Services (DHS). We will work this year on the reconsideration of some of our highest priority causes fundamental to women: balancing work and family; expanding access to health care; and reinstating critical violence prevention programs.

The Maine Women's Lobby has long advocated for programs that will enable women to balance the increasing demands of earning a paycheck and caring for family members. In 2003, we focused on securing a portion of paid family medical leave by supporting the creation of a Temporary Disability Insurance program. This year, we've instead asked the Labor Committee to introduce a more moderate initiative regarding sick leave that would ensure a number of paid sick days for every worker while also allowing workers to use accumulated sick leave to care for ill family members. While not as expansive as the Temporary Disability Insurance program, this bill would

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The Maine Women's Lobby Celebrates 25 Years

Kristin Williamson, Maine Women's Lobby intern, attended the 25th anniversary gala and shares her account of the celebration at the Pavilion in Portland on October 23rd.

Considering the accomplishments of the Maine Women's Lobby over the last 25 years, there was surprisingly little dancing, despite the urging of Speaker of the House Patrick Colwell and his fantastic band, the *Soul Sensations*. What we lacked in motion, however, we made up for in conversation.

As I admired the framed biographies of the Maine Women's Lobby founding members and spoke with some of them who were present that evening, I learned how many of the women became involved with the organization and the ways in which their leadership for women's rights have grown over the years. One thing everybody seemed to have in common was that they didn't know in 1978 how important their actions would be.

The Vice Chair of the Maine Women's Lobby, Barbara Alexander, opened the floor for a number of speakers, including the Honorable Libby Mitchell, Representative Janet Mills, and Susanna Sprague. Two years ago, Susanna was a Linda Smith Dyer Fellow from the University of Maine School of Law working with the Maine Women's Policy Center on a project to link survivors of assault and domestic violence with available economic resources. She shared both her experience as a law student and her discovery of the Maine Women's Policy Center as respondent to a survey for AFDC recipients in Maine years ago. Susanna painted a picture of poverty so stark, it brought tears to my eyes.

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**Inside
this
issue**

- **Member Alert!**
- **Maine Women's Policy Center Launches Federal Courts Project**
- **The Maine Women's Lobby mobilizes for the March for Choice**
- **MaineWomen.org unveiled!**

From the Chair

Last year's celebration of the 25th anniversary of the Maine Women's Lobby came at a critical time in our history. We took the opportunity to celebrate how much we have accomplished since a team of activists came together in 1978. Since that time we've ensured passage of policies that yield opportunities for women. For example, we were the first state to pass a Family Medical Leave Act and then extend those benefits to victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. More recently, we instituted unemployment insurance for part time workers and helped limit access to handguns in the most dangerous protection from abuse cases. Moreover, we have always been a leader in the ongoing fight to secure reproductive rights and access to comprehensive health care. Not content to just respond to the urgent needs of today, we have staked out a vision for the future: *A world where women and girls have equal rights, equal opportunity, and the power to direct their own lives.*

Our successes did not happen overnight. Our strength comes from the leadership of our members, the Boards of Directors, and staff. In this edition of *The Maine Women's Advocate* you'll read how our organizational strength can grow when you - our members - reach out to friends, neighbors, and colleagues to engage them in our work.

You'll also read about the growing strength of our sister organization, the Maine Women's Policy Center, in developing crucial policy initiatives concerning family medical leave, pay equity, and women's leadership. Finally, you'll see how the Maine Women's Policy Center is stepping up to the plate to form a critical coalition addressing the impact of the Bush Administration's extreme federal court nominees on Maine women and families.

2004 brings change and growth to both organizations. To meet the challenge, we are investing in a fundraising campaign that includes - for the first time - a sustained, Board-directed major gifts campaign. In the months to come we'll be calling many of you to not only renew your support for the Maine Women's Lobby and the Maine Women's Policy Center, but to consider making a significant investment in the work that we do. And we'll ask that you take the time to sit with us to share your experience and thoughts about our work to help us frame a vision for the future. Thank you for your ongoing support -- we look forward to our work together in achieving equality for Maine women and girls.

M. Jane Moriarty, Chair of the Boards

From the Executive Director

By the time you read this many of the 121st Legislative Session's most important issues will be decided. As I write, however, it seems that we are just at the beginning of a long journey during this short session. We expect some of the most important issues related to women to be debated. Monitoring and preventing cuts to MaineCare and other critical state programs affecting women, increasing access to emergency contraception; supporting Dirigo Health, and ensuring that every worker can take time off to care for her family members are our priorities.

At the same time, our staff and resources are growing to take on emerging policy and leadership development issues. For example, I'm excited to announce that the Maine Women's Policy Center will be working to mobilize young women to register and vote in 2004.

As you'll also read, we're working in coalition to fight the onslaught of federal court nominees whose views are far outside the mainstream on issues that affect women including labor, disability, civil and privacy rights. To convey up-to-date information and offer opportunities for action and involvement, we've launched a new web site for both organizations, **www.mainewomen.org**. Check it out! And don't hesitate to contact us at any time to learn more.

Sarah Standiford, Executive Director

AT WORK FOR MAINE WOMEN



Maine Women's Lobby and Maine Women's Policy Center staff enjoy a break from a weekly staff meeting.

Angie Buxton, J.D., M.Div. joins the Maine Women's Policy Center as our new Project Coordinator. A graduate of the New England School of Law and Bangor Theological Seminary, her primary focus is developing the Maine Women's Policy Center's new Fair and Independent Federal Courts Project. Angie has worked for the last two years as a legal assistant at Southern Maine Elder Law and as an attorney at the same firm for the last six months. Angie describes one of her proudest moments as coordinator of the progressive religious voice in the "No on One" campaign in 1999 for the Maine Interfaith Council for Reproductive Choices. Her experience and energy make a welcome addition to the staff.

Amy Holland has put her public policy experience to work for our efforts on behalf of work and family. A new mother, Amy helps research and strategize with the Maine Women's Lobby, and as a former analyst at the Office of Policy and Legal Analysis, Amy provides valuable insight to our legislative efforts.

Casey Welch recently completed an internship during the month of January. A major in International Relations at Mt. Holyoke College, Casey is interested in pursuing work in the non-profit sector or in the field of women's rights. As an intern with the Maine Women's Policy Center, she planned and promoted Girls' Day at the State House. She understands very well the importance of events that show young people how government works - in fact it was her involvement with a similar program, Girls' State, which first sparked an interest in non-profit organizations.

Picking up where Casey left off will be **Andrea Breau**. We're fortunate to have Andrea's skills and expertise as she returns to help out with Girls' Day for the third year in a row! Andrea is a recent graduate of Colby College and is currently working to publicize a documentary film while studying for the GRE's. She'll be working to plan Girls' Day at the State House on March 18, 2004.

Kristin Williamson interned with us following the good advice of Sarah Walton, Esq., Assistant Professor at the University of Maine, Augusta where Kristin recently completed her Paralegal Certificate. A new mother, she is excited to be working with the Maine Women's Policy Center & Maine Women's Lobby: "I'm happy to help where I can. Stay-at-home dads and bread-winner moms still raise eyebrows. We shouldn't be limited that way." Handy with the computer, her abilities are a welcome addition to our office.

Maine Women's Lobby partners on the March for Women's Lives

Washington, D.C. is the place to be on Sunday, April 25 for the March for Women's Lives. This March will bring together thousands of women and men from across the United States to advance women's reproductive health, justice, and freedom.

The time is right for a march of historic size. The Bush administration's attacks on family planning, reproductive choice and sexuality education must be stopped.

The Maine Women's Lobby is pleased to be one of the hundreds of co-sponsors for this event. Join our delegation by contacting the office at 622-0851 or e-mail info@mainewomen.org. We'll link you to transportation and overnight stay information. You can also find out more at www.marchforwomen.org.

CHOICE • JUSTICE • ACCESS • HEALTH

**MARCH
FOR WOMEN'S LIVES**

Washington DC April 25, 2004

ABORTION • GLOBAL • FAMILY PLANNING

Celebration, continued from page 1

We learned that for her the fellowship had helped to forge a path to self-sufficiency and involvement in the work of social change.

Outgoing Board Chair Sharon Sudbay thanked the evening's co-hosts, Senate President Beverly Daggett and former Speaker of the House, Libby Mitchell, and presented the Courage Award to our former executive director and Commissioner of the Maine Department of Labor, Laura Fortman, for her ceaseless efforts in advancing women's issues. She graciously accepted and then shared some of her experiences, paying tribute to Susanna's accomplishments and the rewarding nature of working to advance women's issues. I learned that it's the people we meet, the lives we change, and in turn how our lives are changed that make her work, and ours, worthwhile.

The Maine Women's Lobby would like to thank each of you, our members, who helped make the 25th anniversary celebration possible. Without you, there would be nothing to celebrate.

The Maine Women's Policy Center Works for Fair and Independent Federal Courts

On Friday afternoon, January 16, just a few days before Congress was scheduled to return, President Bush made a reappointment of Charles Pickering for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit. He bypassed and unilaterally installed Pickering despite the fact that the Senate Judiciary Committee had rejected his nomination in 2002 and the Senate had withheld its consent to the appointment.

What does a Judge from the Fifth Circuit have to do with the women of Maine? In short – a lot.

Federal courts are important institutions in a democracy. They hear cases that arise under federal law and between citizens of different states. Federal District Courts decide over 300,000 cases a year and federal Circuit Courts of Appeals issue more than 28,000 opinions a year. In contrast, this last term the Supreme Court decided only 79 cases. That is why who sits on the federal bench matters to Americans. The Circuit Courts of Appeals are courts of last resort for more than 99% of all cases coming before them and between them they decide the majority of cases relating to women. The Bush Administration's court packing strategy has served to appoint dozens of justices whose opinions are far outside the mainstream on disability rights, worker's rights, civil rights, and the right to privacy. That's why the Maine Women's Policy Center is leading the way to educate Maine women about the importance of these lifetime appointments.

The Circuit Courts of Appeal are the courts of last resort for more than 99% of all cases coming before them and between them they decide the majority of cases relating to women.

A few examples: Judge Priscilla Owen of the Texas Supreme Court is so conservative that she often dissents from the already conservative majority. Owen has consistently voted to dismiss suits brought by workers and victims of discrimination. But her most virulent dissents have come in the area of abortion, dealing with Texas's parental notification statute. Before Owen was nominated for the Fifth Circuit, she voted against every single request by young women seeking bypass around the parental notification law.

Alabama Attorney General William Pryor, nominated to the Eleventh Circuit, has pushed for the execution of the mentally retarded, compared homosexuality to bestiality, defended the posting of Bible quotes and the Ten Commandments at the courthouse door and advocated rescinding a key provision of the Voting Rights Act, which protects the right of African-Americans to vote. He has called *Roe v. Wade* "the worst abomination of constitutional law in our history." He has advocated the dismantling of the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, and the ADA.

Remember, these appointments to the federal court are lifetime appointments. The legacy of extreme federal court judges will endure. The danger is that the advances we have made over the last 70 years in women's rights will be reversed.

That is why the Senate's constitutional responsibility to "advise and consent" is so important. Their independent role is to consider and scrutinize each nominee carefully, examining their records and their honest and complete answers to questions about how they think and what they think. The Maine Women's Policy Center believes that we deserve judges who will represent the interests of women, and who are honest and competent. With support from the Alliance for Justice, in coalition with the AFL-CIO, American Association of University Women, and the Disability Rights Council, among others, we are launching the Fair and Independent Federal Courts project. Want to get involved? Please contact Project Coordinator Angie Buxton at 622-0851 or e-mail info@mainewomen.org.

Take Action Today to Keep Our Courts Fair and Independent!

Consider making a contribution towards the Fair and Independent Courts Project. Every dollar counts and will help us to

- ♦ educate community members and policy makers about the impact of the federal courts;
- ♦ build a broad coalition and network of concerned citizens; and,
- ♦ mobilize the grassroots to defend our federal courts.

Your contribution of \$100, \$250, \$500 or whatever you can afford will help us preserve the rights of women and girls!

Members Alert!

"Members are the heart and soul of the Lobby," says Betsy Foster. Betsy, a Maine Women's Lobby member from Waldoboro, was hired in 2003 to spend several months working to increase membership. During that time she organized mailings to sister organizations and contacted people whom she has come to know in her years of activism in the state. She organized follow-up calls to "lost" members and directed our annual membership appeal. Five house parties at members' homes enlisted a few dozen additional new members. In fact, when Betsy completed her work, membership had increased 48%!

According to Betsy, "there is a Lobby issue for every woman in Maine." Each and every one of us has a stake in the issues the Maine Women's Lobby addresses: economic opportunity, health care and reproductive choice, civil rights, and protection from violence. That's why this year we are asking each of you to reach out to your own network. From time to time during the legislative session ALERTS go out to members with information about important issues and a request for action. This "Members ALERT" asks each of us to enlist one new member this year. Use the enclosed envelope, share this newsletter, host a house party, or call the office for how you can help. The aggregate of individual dues and contributions supports our full time lobbyist in the legislature and our work with allied organizations—all of which has resulted in advances for Maine women in every one of our 25 years. The price is right!



Maine Women Online

At last! A current and informative web site for the Maine Women's Policy Center and Maine Women's Lobby.

Check us out at **www.mainewomen.org**

You'll find:

- Information on pending legislation
- Tips for taking Action
- Current information and resources
- A way to make a secure online gift to the Maine Women's Policy Center

We're constantly striving to develop and enhance the site, so check back often!

e-mail

Because so many legislative issues demand immediate action, we use occasional email alerts to keep our members informed about urgent policy issues during the legislative session. We also send a monthly e-newsletter to keep members up-to-date on events and activities. Signing up is easy! Just email us at info@mainewomen.org and write "subscribe" in the text of the message!

Legislation, continued from page 1

offer some security for workers who face an illness in the family with a negligible cost to businesses and individuals. And because 85% of voters support ensuring a minimum amount of paid sick leave, the time is now to ensure that most employees have access to this critical benefit and its flexible use.

Meanwhile, the campaign to increase access to Emergency Contraception (EC), initiated in 2002, has progressed. Working in concert with the members of the Emergency Contraception Access Coalition, the Maine Women's Lobby helped advance *An Act to Authorize Collaborative Practice for Emergency Contraception* (L.D. 1152), which was carried over from last year. This bill had a public hearing in January in front of the Business, Research and Economic Development Committee. Lead sponsor Senate President Beverly Daggett spoke in favor of the bill and was joined by House Majority Leader John Richardson and House Minority Leader Joe Bruno. We expect a positive vote in the house and senate and a dramatic step forward in preventing unintended

pregnancy and increasing health options for women.

Yet another issue to be revisited is the reinstatement of crucial violence prevention dollars. Several years ago, *An Act to Fund Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Intervention and Prevention* (L.D. 524) passed in the 120th Legislature. This was the first significant funding increase for domestic violence and sexual assault prevention and intervention programs since 1986. It allocated \$1.2 million in 2000-2001 and \$3 million in 2002-2003. Despite strong advocacy by Maine Women's Lobby and the successful passage of L.D. 524, the funding was axed months later by Governor King to fill a budget deficit. The bill was re-introduced by Speaker Patrick Colwell this session and the Maine Women's Lobby will — once again as our founders did in 1979 — champion the effort to fund these critical programs.

ABOUT THE MAINE WOMEN'S LOBBY AND MAINE WOMEN'S POLICY CENTER

The Maine Women's Lobby and the Maine Women's Policy Center work in partnership to improve economic, social and political opportunities for Maine women and girls through public policy and leadership development.

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

The Maine Women's Policy Center (founded in 1990) works to improve social, political, and economic opportunities for Maine women and girls through public outreach, education, leadership development, and research. Contributions are welcome and are tax-deductible.

The Maine Women's Advocate newsletter is published jointly by the Maine Women's Lobby and the Maine Women's Policy Center three times a year. The Maine Women's Lobby also produces legislative alerts during the legislative session. If you would like to receive alerts by email, please write to info@mainewomen.org and note "subscribe to email alert" in the body of the message.

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