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## Maine Women's Advocate\_No. 38 (Winter-Spring 2005)

Maine Women's Lobby Staff

*Maine Women's Lobby*

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### Repository Citation

Staff, Maine Women's Lobby, "Maine Women's Advocate\_No. 38 (Winter-Spring 2005)" (2005). *Maine Women's Publications - All*. 215.

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# The MAINE WOMEN'S ADVOCATE

WINTER/SPRING 2005

Number 38



a publication of the  
**MAINE WOMEN'S  
LOBBY**  
and the  
**MAINE WOMEN'S  
POLICY CENTER**

## COURTWATCH:

### The Fair Federal Court Coalition Defends Against Extreme Nominees

With at least one and possibly as many as three U.S. Supreme Court justices ready to retire, the time is now to speak out for the appointment and confirmation of independent and fair-minded nominees who respect the rights and dignity of Maine women and girls.

What's at stake for women when it comes to federal court appointments?

- The right to privacy, which protects against government intrusion into personal matters including marriage, pregnancy, contraception, and abortion;
- The right to equal opportunity in the workplace;
- The right to equal opportunity in education, including high school and college athletics;
- The right to be free from sexual harassment at work and at school;
- The ability to enforce the benefits of low-income women, families and children under federal programs and laws; and,

(continued inside)

## The Maine Women's Lobby Advocates for Today's Workforce

The economy is changing and so must the Maine workforce.

A majority of women are in the workforce, up from 43% in 1970 to 60% in 2002. At the same time, Maine's need for skilled workers is increasing. This means that attracting, training, and retaining skilled workers from our pool of adult workers is critical for the future of Maine's economy.

The Maine Women's Lobby is advocating for working women and families with several legislative initiatives including a bill to help women balance work with family needs. Caregiving pressures are increasing for all families, and so is the average work week. Along with care that families provide for children, responsibility for elder care is increasing. In fact, 2 out of 3 Americans under the age of 60 are expected to be responsible for the care of an elderly relative by 2008! Every day Maine families engage in a precarious balancing act -- struggling to be good employees while caring for children and adult family members. But our system of voluntary paid leave is failing to reach thousands of caregivers whose families depend on them.

The Maine Women's Lobby believes that no one should have to choose between their job and their family. We've all been faced with the need to take time off to care for a sick child or family member. But too many workers, particularly low-wage

(continued inside)

## Inside this issue

- The Maine Women's Lobby announces ambitious legislative agenda
- Maine women question candidates at the *Breakfast of Champions*
- The Maine Women's Policy Center acts to help divorcing women maintain health coverage

## From the Executive Director

Headlines in the *Portland Press Herald* and *Kennebec Journal* have widely reported the declining numbers of women in the Maine Legislature. It's true that we are witnessing a five-year decline. You can count on the Maine Women's Policy Center to continue to highlight the issue and work to reverse the trend.

Maine has long been an example of women's democratic participation. But in recent years the number of women in elected office has slowed, down from a high of 33% to just 24% in the 122nd Legislature. Women hold only 44 seats. Research suggests that we're seeing a reduction in the number of women *considering a run for office in the first place*. Coupled with the increasing challenges of negotiating paid work with caregiving for children and adult family members, the barriers to women considering a run for office are great.

The decline should concern all of us. Women's representation has implications for the types of policies raised and considered by lawmakers. In fact, research consistently demonstrates that women state legislators are more likely to promote legislation to benefit women, regardless of political party and other affiliations. The Center for American Women and Politics tells us that women often do not, on their own, decide to run. Instead, they need to be encouraged by political office holders, party officials, friends, mentors, and colleagues. We call on all political parties to prioritize recruitment of women now -- before the election season begins -- and we pledge to further strengthen our leadership development work so that our members, advocates, and activists will step up and lead. Take this as my personal invitation to you to consider a run for office!

In this issue of *The Maine Women's Advocate*, you'll read about our policy initiatives to help ease the work family crunch, and our voter engagement and economic justice programs that serve to identify more advocates, leaders, and potential candidates. During Women's History Month in March, the Maine Women's Policy Center and the Maine Women's Lobby will be working together to highlight women's leadership. We'll welcome Laura Liswood, international speaker and co-founder of the Council of Women World Leaders, to address women legislators and cabinet members at a luncheon on March 10. Then we will be partnering with the University of Southern Maine Muskie School of Public Service for the **Women in Public Life Forum**, also on March 10. The ninth annual **Girls' Day at the State House** will be held on March 24. Finally, we'll culminate Women's History Month with a community night fundraiser at **O'Naturals** in Portland on March 30. For updates on any of these activities, check out our web site at [www.mainewomen.org](http://www.mainewomen.org). And happy Women's History Month to you!

Sarah Standiford  
Executive Director

### Meet the staff



Bonnie Buckmore (left) and  
Lauralee Raymond (right)  
volunteer at the Dirigo Alliance  
Awards Reception.

**Cara Bilodeau** is our newest staff member. Cara joins us as our Community Organizer. She will be leading the Fair and Independent Courts Coalition in highlighting the importance of federal court appointments to women's health and rights and will be organizing our members to take action.

**Pamela Boivin** joined us last summer as the Linda Smith Dyer Fellow. Pamela is a third year law student at the University of Maine School of Law. She is working on domestic violence prevention policies and researching ways to increase access to health insurance coverage for women undergoing divorce.

**Bonnie Buckmore** joined the staff of the Maine Women's Policy Center and the Maine Women's Lobby in August as Development and Communications Coordinator. You'll be sure to meet Bonnie at fundraising events throughout the spring and summer.

**Christina Griffin** is our newest intern from the the University of Southern Maine Political Science Department. Christina has been developing the Girls' Day at the State House program and advancing our work-family initiative.

**Lauralee Raymond** recently celebrated her two-year anniversary as the Maine Women's Lobby's Legislative Coordinator. You'll find Lauralee in the halls of the legislature most every day this spring.

**Sarah Standiford** has served as Executive Director since August of 2003. Sarah has overseen a growing and talented staff of advocates and researchers.

The Maine Women's Lobby also bids farewell to our stellar 2004 intern, **Amy Olfene**, who spearheaded multiple communications and graphic design projects during her 5-month internship. Amy returns to her studies at the University of Southern Maine. *Thank you, Amy!*

# The Maine Women's Lobby's Legislative Agenda: Working for All Maine Women



**Maine Women's Lobby's Legislative Priorities:** The 122nd Legislature convened in early January to address over 2,000 legislative initiatives. Throughout the spring, debate will center on the Governor's proposed budget for Fiscal Years 2006-2007, in which he proposes significant cuts to programs that women depend on including drugs for the elderly, mental health services, and MaineCare benefits for individuals. As always, the Maine Women's Lobby will be there defending programs that serve women and girls, preventing attacks on our rights, and advancing opportunities for all.

**Defending the right to choose:** This year we expect nearly a dozen bills aimed at curtailing access to abortion, family planning, and reproductive health care. Among them: attempts to enact a mandatory waiting period and state-scripted counseling for women seeking abortion services; an act to allow the purchase of pro-life license plates; and attempts to do away with Maine's successful Adult Involvement Law. The Maine Women's Lobby will be working with our partners in the Maine Choice Coalition to ensure that the legislature continues to uphold the right to choose.

**Protecting against violence:** Over the past few years, Maine lawmakers have debated legislation modeled after the national Unborn Victims of Violence Act. Proponents claim that this legislation is intended to deter violence against pregnant women. In reality, the bills do little more than serve to promote an anti-abortion agenda by defining a fetus as a person in criminal law. The Maine Women's Lobby will be working to defeat a bill called *An Act to Protect Unborn Children from Acts of Violence*. The disturbing fact is, however, that the leading cause of death for pregnant women is homicide. Clearly, pregnancy often serves as a flashpoint for domestic violence. That's why the Maine Women's Lobby is working to pass the Motherhood Protection Act. This bill, sponsored by Senate President Beth Edmonds, allows for special weight in sentencing crimes of murder against pregnant women *without* undermining critical tenants of *Roe v. Wade*, and it calls for increased data collection on the problem of violence against pregnant women. The bill was developed with the input of violence prevention groups, and it serves to keep the focus of the legal system on the primary victim: the pregnant woman.

**Helping women navigate work and family demands:** We all know the balancing act that women face between providing needed care for children and adult family members and working full or part time. The needs of Maine's elder population are increasing, and as a result, the workplace must change as well. The Maine Women's Lobby is promoting *An Act to Care for Maine's Families* (see front page article). The bill, sponsored by Senate President Beth Edmonds, enables workers to use their already accrued sick days to care for either themselves or an ill family member. This bill would be a big step forward in ensuring that no one has to choose between their job and their families when illness strikes.

**Ensuring the unemployment system meets the needs of today's workers:** In 2003, the Maine Women's Lobby lead the effort to extend unemployment insurance to part-time workers, enabling those who would otherwise be eligible for benefits not be denied simply because of their part-time work history. Unfortunately, those benefits are set to expire in 2005. Because 70% of part-time workers are women and many families rely on income from part-time work, the Maine Women's Lobby will once again advocate for the bill by supporting Governor Baldacci's initiative to remove the sunset provision from the law.



*Maine Women's Lobby members demonstrate in support of reproductive choice on the 32nd anniversary of Roe v. Wade.*

**Civil rights for all:** The Maine Women's Lobby has always been part of the struggle to end discrimination against gays and lesbians. This year, we are supporting a bill sponsored by Speaker John Richardson and supported by the Governor that would finally end discrimination based on sexual orientation in housing, credit, and employment. The time is now to end discrimination in Maine. In addition, the Maine Women's Lobby will be supporting efforts to ensure fair tax reform, expand access to higher education for adult workers, and increase wages. To stay up to date on the issues of concern to Maine women, check out [www.mainewomen.org](http://www.mainewomen.org), or e-mail [info@mainewomen.org](mailto:info@mainewomen.org) to be added to our monthly e-newsletter, *Maine Women Online*.

## AT RISK: Women Losing Health Coverage Because of Divorce

It's no secret that for women undergoing divorce or separation, loss of health insurance can contribute to financial disaster. Because nearly half of all insured women depend on their spouses for health insurance coverage, divorce is a significant life event that can create a barrier to full health care access and even economic stability. That's why, with support from the Cox Foundation, Health Law Advocates, and the Bingham Program, the Maine Women's Policy Center is conducting research and policy analysis to identify solutions to this problem. Says Pamela Boivin, lead staffer for the project, "The vast majority of women gain health insurance because of their husband's employment. When coverage ceases as a result of divorce, it can pose tremendous problems for women and families." The Maine Women's Policy Center is gathering data and anecdotes from family law attorneys and women who've undergone divorce to assess the extent of the problem, and propose solutions.

### *Help us Leap into the 21st Century...*

Long-time members of our organizations know that we've struggled for years to meet the rapidly growing needs for internal computer and data systems. As a non-profit policy development organization, we rely on pulling together and dispensing information *fast*. Thanks to the ongoing and generous support of individuals, the Maine Women's Policy Center has updated its word processing, file sharing, and data systems with the installation of three new computers and a solid server to protect critical information. **However, we're still in need of two new desktop computers to serve new staff people. Won't you consider making a special contribution to make the final upgrade?** Please mark "computers" on your check memo, and as always, contributions to the Maine Women's Policy Center are tax-deductible. For more information about this giving opportunity, contact [info@mainewomen.org](mailto:info@mainewomen.org). *Thank you for your support!*

## Did You Know...

The Maine **Women's Policy Center** &  
Maine **Women's Lobby** are online?

Check us out at  
**[www.mainewomen.org](http://www.mainewomen.org)**!

## Maine Women's Policy Center Leads Voter Engagement Effort

With the 2004 elections over, the Maine Women's Policy Center is celebrating our successes in engaging women in the elections and leveraging those activities into our ongoing campaign for economic justice. Working with constituency groups in northern and central Maine, MWPC brought over 400 individuals, advocates, and policymakers together for three *Breakfast of Champions* events in Portland, Bangor, and Presque Isle. Over 150 Presque Isle citizens turned out to hear Congressman Michael Michaud and challenger Brian Hamel discuss their perspective on women's issues ranging from access to higher education, to women's wages, to reproductive health. But women's engagement need not start and end at the polls. The Maine Women's Policy Center is committed to encouraging women in a lifetime of advocacy through our ongoing Women's Economic Justice Campaign. To participate in our effort, contact [info@mainewomen.org](mailto:info@mainewomen.org)!



Kristin Aiello, MWPC/MWL Chair (left), introduces (L-R) Kerry-Edwards campaign representative Dorothy Melanson, Bush-Cheney campaign representative Jan Staples, and Green Party Vice-Presidential Candidate Patricia LaMarche.

"I hope to be the last woman who runs for Vice President that doesn't win."

Green Party VP candidate

*Mark your calendars now for the  
2005 Breakfast of Champions series:*

- Portland: October 3, 2005 -- Holiday Inn by the Bay
- Bangor: October 19, 2005 -- Spectacular Events Center
- Presque Isle: October 26, 2005 -- Northern Maine



## Your Everyday Shopping Can Benefit the Maine Women's Policy Center!



For another way to support our programs, register at [www.iGive.com/MWPC](http://www.iGive.com/MWPC) and go there *every* time you shop online! Up to 27% of your online purchases will come directly to the Maine Women's Policy Center.

It's FREE, there are no invisible costs or obligations, and you can shop at nearly 600 popular online stores. Just go to [www.iGive.com/MWPC](http://www.iGive.com/MWPC) to sign up -- and help change online shopping for *good*.

## Court Watch, continued from front page

The authority of Congress to pass effective laws penalizing violence against women, prohibiting discrimination in the workplace, and ensuring the safety and welfare of the American people.

The time is now to make our voices heard. This year, the Maine Women's Policy Center will once again be leading the Fair and Independent Federal Courts Coalition in an education effort designed to engage the public in the debate about the federal courts. Women in Maine need to know that extreme federal court appointments, including a U.S. Supreme Court appointment, could undercut decades of advancements for women in Maine and throughout the country.

The threat is magnified by Republican leaders in the Senate speaking ominously about engaging the "nuclear option" -- a Senate rule change that would prevent the filibuster of a nominee by the minority party. Judicial filibusters, though rare, are part of the Senate's responsibility to advise and consent, and they are an important system of checks and balances in this nation's government. Of the more than 200 nominees put forward by the President, to date only twelve -- the most extreme -- have been blocked. We call on the U.S. Senate to uphold the respected rules of the Senate and ensure a fair process.

## Workforce, continued from front page

workers, face an impossible choice: leaving a sick child at day care or without needed care at home, or lose income and risk being fired. This leads to both a loss of jobs and incomes as well as worse health outcomes for children.

This year, the Maine Women's Lobby will be advocating for the *Act to Care for Maine's Families*, sponsored by Senate President Beth Edmonds and House Speaker John Richardson, which will allow workers to use their already accrued sick days when they need it to care for sick children or adult family members. The bill does not create an additional benefit. It simply legalizes the common practice of allowing flexible use of sick days for family care.

Many employers already extend this benefit, understanding that flexible leave for family care is good for the business' bottom line. Businesses can keep productive, well-trained employees, and families benefit when they can provide adequate care for their children or parents. Says one small business owner "I was committed to providing this benefit from the get-go, and it had a positive result for my business. It contributed to overall employee loyalty and retention!"

Maine must attract skilled workers. Flexible use of sick days is one benefit that workers increasingly demand. In fact, industry research tells us that workers value family-friendly policies more than most every other workplace benefit.

Caregiving responsibilities and other needs often encourage women to seek part-time work. In 2003, the Maine Women's Lobby won passage of a bill that allows an individual who is otherwise eligible for unemployment compensation to limit his or her job search to part-time work and continue to be eligible for benefits. Unfortunately, there is a sunset provision on this bill that would end these benefits after September of this year.

The Maine Women's Lobby has worked towards part-time unemployment insurance since 1995, when the Maine Women's Policy Center conducted an extensive survey of recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), finding that although 74% of survey respondents had worked within the past five years, only 10% had received unemployment compensation when their jobs ended. Extending unemployment insurance to part-time workers is critical to help families stay self-sufficient. And because 70% of part-time workers are women, passage of this legislation has a significant positive impact on women workers. Governor Baldacci has introduced a bill this year to remove the sunset provision. We will advocate for its passage.

## 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 non-partisan, 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 e-mail alerts, please send an e-mail to [info@mainewomen.org](mailto:info@mainewomen.org) and note "subscribe to e-mail alert" in the body of the message.

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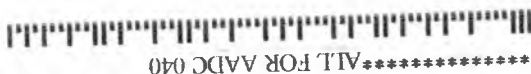
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