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Maine NOW Times (Winter 1999)

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National Organization for Women - Maine Chapter

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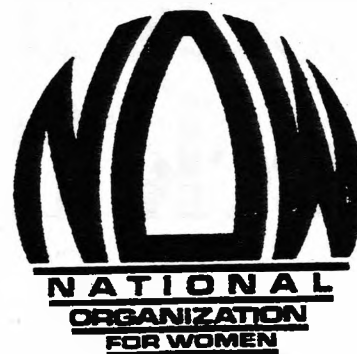
Staff, National Organization for Women - Maine Chapter, "Maine NOW Times (Winter 1999)" (1999). *Maine Women's Publications - All*. 493.

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Maine NOW Times

Winter 1999



Elections & "House Party" for Choice March 27, 1-3 PM

Join Maine NOW to elect a new State Coordinator and to participate in a model "House Party" for choice on March 27 from 1-3 PM at the IBEW 1837 Union Hall on the Old Winthrop Road in Manchester, Maine - just west of Augusta off route 202.

Maine is facing a referendum battle over a "partial birth" abortion ban this fall. The March 27 "House Party" for choice will be a chance for pro-choice activists to experience a model house party, which can then be reproduced in your own neighborhood to get accurate information out to your friends who may be swayed by vicious and misleading campaigning against choice which is already underway. House parties are easy and fun - Farmington NOW has already co-sponsored one which was attended by twenty-one students and community members many of whom will be hosting their own parties in the coming months.

If each Maine NOW member hosted a gathering of just five people we could reach over four thousand voters with this method alone, and it can grow from there. Count yourself in - we will need everyone in the coming campaign.

All pro-choice activists are invited to the party - all NOW members in good standing will be eligible to vote for the State Coordinator (a process which should take only about fifteen minutes of the party).

To get to the IBEW Local 1837 Union Hall, take Route 202 from either Augusta or Lewiston. The Old Winthrop Road runs parallel to Route 202 between the Scandinavian Inn and Coastal Oil, on the north side of the road. It is a white ranch house with blue shutters and the phone number there is 623-1030.

If you have any questions, call Cynthia Phinney at 778-9506 or e-mail cynth@gwi.net.

Other Choice Events.....

New England Regional Conference of Medical Students for Choice and Nursing Students for Choice Saturday, February 27 -Harvard Medical School in Boston

For further information about this event contact Nancy Foss at the MCLU or visit the Abortion Access Project web site at www.repro-activist.org.

National Day of Appreciation for Abortion Providers

Wednesday, March 10, 1999

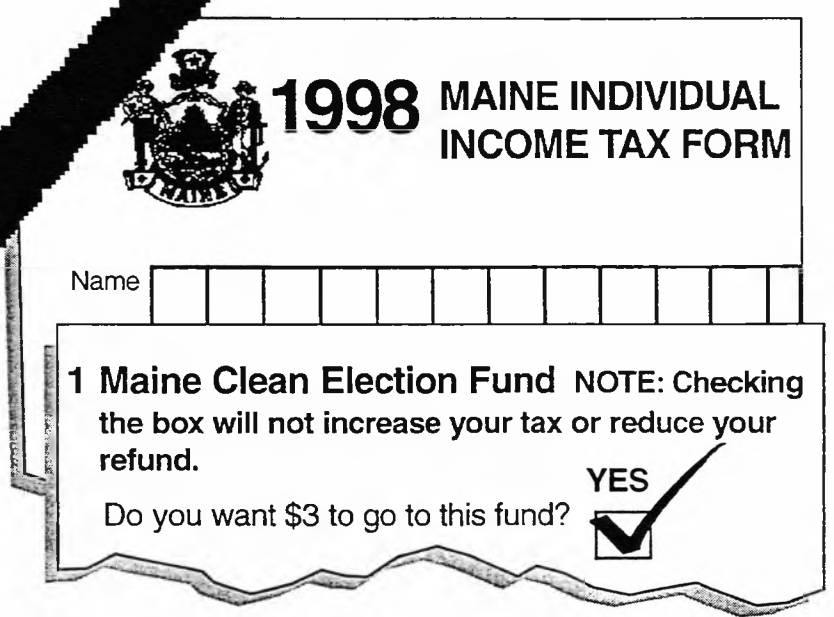

This is a great time to write a letter to the editor of your local paper, reminding people that committed health care professionals risk their lives to keep choice a reality.

**Reproductive Rights Conference
Hampshire College, Amherst MA
April 9-11, 1999**

This is an excellent conference and it is free! A great place for student and community activists to go and network with others interested in reproductive rights and health. Call (413) 559-5645 for more information.

Let's get as many Maine students as possible to this conference!

Check it out. Check it off!



Your Maine tax form has a three dollar check-off that lets you do something about campaign finance reform, *without adding to your tax bill*. By checking "YES," you direct three of your tax dollars to the Maine Clean Election Fund.

Starting in the year 2000, the Clean Election Fund will give limited, equal funding to qualified candidates who accept strict spending limits and reject all private money.

Do your part.
 **Check "Yes" for Clean Elections.**

For more information, contact Maine Citizens for Clean Elections (207) 780-8657 or mclf97@aol.com

Maine Legislation: Your Help is Needed!

Listed below are pieces of legislation that affect women economically. Many other bills are being heard this session as well. Several concern access to reproductive health care - contact Kim Simmons for information 829-3360. The Legislature will also again vote on including sexual orientation in the Maine Human Rights Act. Contact Janet May at 862-5907 for more information.

This article comes from "MAIN Update," a quarterly publication of the Maine Association of Interdependent Neighborhoods (MAIN) and the Maine Equal Justice Project (MEJP). MAIN is a coalition of individuals and organizations that work on low income issues. MEJP is a civil legal services organization that represents MAIN in the legislature, before state agencies and in the courts.

If you have any questions, contact Chris Rusnov at the Maine Equal Justice Project 626-7058 x204 or at home at 873-0878.

ACTION!

If you would be affected by any of these bills or work with people who would be affected (social worker, head start program, health care provider....) consider sharing your story with the legislature through testimony or a letter. If you care about these issues as a citizen, contact your legislators and let them know of your support. Help them do the right thing!

Everyone makes a difference!

**Public Hearings
Health Care Legislation
March 3 and 10 - Augusta
(tentative schedule-call to confirm)**

Legislative Information
287-1692

Message to:
Representatives 1-800-423-2900
Senators 1-800-423-6900

Access to Health Care

134,000 Maine people have no health insurance. MAIN's legislative agenda would do something about it! Maine has new money that could be used to provide health care.

Late this fall Maine joined many other states in signing a settlement agreement with the tobacco industry that will bring millions of dollars into the State each year. This money is to repay states for what they spent in their Medicaid programs for smoking-related illnesses. As we currently understand it, Maine will receive \$18 million dollars early in 1999, and approximately \$50 million dollars each year beginning in the year 2000, and increasing over time.

MAIN will urge legislators and the Governor to use this new money to provide access to health care for people who are uninsured. Here are some of the bills this money could fund.

Covering Parents!

An Act to Promote Healthy Maine Families. Sponsor: Senator Chellie Pingree (D - North Haven) (*Maine NOW member*)

This bill takes the much needed step of increasing access to health care for the parents of children covered by the

Medicaid Program. It would provide Medicaid coverage to parents whose family incomes are under 150% of the federal poverty level--\$20,484 for a family of 3.

It would also provide access to Medicaid for the parents of Cub Care children *if and when federal matching funds become available*. This would bring parent coverage to 185% of the poverty level--\$25,264 for a family of 3.

MAIN hopes to build on last year's legislative victory expanding health coverage to nearly 15,000 Maine children by making the point that those children will only be safe and healthy if their parents are healthy too.

Covering Prescription Drugs for the Elderly and Disabled!

An Act to Increase Access to Prescription Drugs for Elderly and Disabled Persons. Sponsor: Senator Chellie Pingree (D - North Haven) (*Maine NOW member*)

Imagine being disabled by heart disease and having to spend most of your meager income on life saving prescription drugs. MAIN often sees seniors and people with disabilities with income just over the poverty level spending a high percentage of their income on drugs. Their Medicare does not

cover prescription drugs. They often must make the cruel choice between food and needed medicine.

This bill would provide the Medicaid drug benefit to people with disabilities and to elders 62 and over whose family income is under 185% of the federal poverty level--\$14,896 for a single person and \$20,091 for a couple. Medicaid eligibility is currently limited to elderly and disabled persons under the poverty level--\$8052 for an individual and \$10,860 for a couple.

Covering Those With No Safety Net!

An Act to Increase Access to Health Care for Low Income Maine People. Sponsor: Representative Tom Kane (D - Saco)

In Maine, if you do not have minor children and you are not elderly or disabled, you are not eligible for state sponsored health care no matter how low your income. Yet more and more of Maine's jobs have lower wages and no affordable health benefits. This bill would give Medicaid coverage to individuals or couples without children if their income is less than 125% of the federal poverty level--\$10,065 for an individual and \$13,575 for a couple.

It is not yet clear whether Maine could get any financial support from the federal government if it were to offer benefits to these individuals. Two-thirds of the dollars spent in the Medicaid Program come from the federal government. These in-

dividuals do not qualify for Medicaid under current program rules, even though their incomes are very low, because they do not have children. Maine would have to get a "waiver" of those rules from the federal government to cover this group through the Medicaid Program.

Without support from the federal government Maine would have to pay the entire cost of covering these individuals, making this bill very costly. While MAIN feels strongly that the health care needs of this group of persons must be addressed, it may take more than one legislative session to achieve this goal.

Real Access to Dental Care!

An Act to Increase Access to Oral Health Care. Sponsor: Speaker Steve Rowe (D - Portland)

One of the biggest complaints about the Medicaid Program is the lack of access to dental care for both children and adults. Medicaid will pay for dental coverage for children and emergency dental services for adults - if you can find a dentist who accepts Medicaid.

Over the past year, the Department of Human Services has increased the amount of money it pays to dentists and has established a toll-free line to help families find dentists who will take Medicaid, but access problems continue.

This bill would provide over \$1.5 million in the next two years to help communities establish dental clinics that would be available to all regardless of income. These clinics would

be required to accept Medicaid patients and offer services on a sliding fee scale to all others with incomes under 200% of the poverty level (\$27,312 for a family of 3), including low income adults. The community clinics would be required to have low-income people on their boards of directors.

TANF (Formerly AFDC)

Increasing TANF Benefits - who can live on \$439 per month?

An Act to Increase Access to Basic Needs for Low Income Children and Families. Sponsor: Senator Anne Rand (D - Portland) (*Maine NOW member*)

After taking 5 cuts in the 1990s, Maine's TANF benefits remain shamefully low despite last year's important 5% increase. Maine benefits are the lowest in New England--over \$100 per month less than the state paying the next lowest benefit.

The nearly 25,000 children who need this assistance must survive on income that is only 39% of the federal poverty level. Even when Food Stamps are considered, their monthly income remains nearly 30% below poverty. This legislation would increase monthly TANF checks by 5% again in 1999 for all families receiving benefits. It would also require a 5% increase each year until Maine reaches the monthly New England average for a family of 3. The New England average is

currently \$574 a month compared to Maine's current benefit of \$439.

We have a long way to go, but an annual increase would be a reliable means of getting us there faster.

Parents as Scholars (PaS)

Leveling the Playing Field for Parents as Scholars!

An Act to Improve Access to Education for Parents As Scholars Participants. Sponsor: Representative Michael Quint (D - Portland)

In 1997 the Legislature created the Parents as Scholars program to assure that parents who are eligible for TANF retain access to higher education. Now, nearly 1,000 parents are now enrolled in the Parents as Scholars Program (PaS).

In their first two years they are required to participate 20 hours per week. School and study time both count toward these required hours. However, after 2 years, parents are required to work 20 hours in addition to going to school. School and study time do not count toward this additional requirement. This is nearly twice what parents in the TANF program are required to do.

As a result, parents who are struggling to go to school, raise a family and study must also fit 20 hours of work into their already very full

schedules. Many simply can't do it and feel pressured to leave school. Others despair as their grades drop because they cannot find enough hours in the day to study. This legislation would eliminate this second 20-hour requirement for parents who have been in PaS for more than two years. It will allow them to focus their energy on finishing their education, and help them get into the workforce sooner with a degree that will allow them to better support their families.

Unemployment Insurance

Fix Unemployment Insurance!

An Act to Make the Unemployment Compensation Program More Responsive to the Needs of Today's Workforce and Ensure the Solvency of the Unemployment Compensation Trust Fund. Sponsor: Representative Pam Hatch (D. Skowhegan) (*Maine NOW member*)

There are two crises in today's unemployment insurance program. First, it does not cover many people who need it. Only 1 out of 4 workers receive unemployment when they lose their job. Unbelievably, only 1 out of 10 working women who receive TANF got unemployment when they lost their job.

The second crisis is that the system is in danger of going broke. The trust fund from which benefits are paid is paying out more funds - even in this economy - than it is able to get in taxes.

This legislation addresses both problems. First, it expands benefits so that they will be more available to part-time and seasonal workers, and persons who lose their jobs because of a child care or transportation problem. Second, it increases the amount of money available for the program by increasing, and more fairly distributing employer contributions to the trust fund.

Food Stamps for Legal Immigrants

Continue Food Stamps for Legal Immigrants!

An Act to Ensure Adequate Nutrition for Low Income Legal Aliens. Sponsor: Representative Michael Quint (D - Portland)

Many legal immigrants lost food stamp benefits as a result of the federal welfare reform bill passed in 1996. Last year, the Maine Legislature restored benefits to immigrants with State funds, but ended those benefits in June of 1999. This legislation would continue to provide this much needed food assistance after June, 1999.

Other Legislation of Interest to MAIN

It is still too early to be able to report on all legislation affecting low income people and families that will be debated in this legisla-

tive session. However, we do know that the following important issues will be considered:

Minimum Wage. Several legislators have introduced bills increasing the minimum wage by varying amounts. At least one would increase the minimum wage each year based on the amount of inflation in the prior year. MAINE has been a long time supporter of a higher minimum wage. Last year a minimum wage increase was passed by the legislature, but vetoed by the governor.

State Earned Income Tax Credit. We know of at least one bill that would create a State Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for low income families with children. This bill will likely set the amount of the state credit at a percentage of the federal (EITC). For example, if a family was eligible for \$2,000 from the federal EITC, they might receive a *state EITC* equaling 20% of the federal credit, or \$400. We do not yet know what the amount of credit proposed in this bill will be.

Ombudsman Legislation. This legislation is the result of the work of a Commission to study the need for ombudsman services in the Departments of Human Services and Mental Health. An ombudsman investigates complaints and assist in achieving fair settlements. This legislation would establish an ombudsman for the Department of Human Services to help people in the TANF, ASPIRE, and Medicaid Programs, and those involved with the child welfare system. This bill would

also make a number of other changes including:

- * Requiring DHS to monitor sanctions in the TANF Program to make sure that people are not sanctioned if they have "good cause" for failing to follow program rules;

- * Providing access to a fair hearing for families involved with the child protective system, to challenge any conditions that the Department may make on the family before taking custody of a child;

- * Requiring DHS to give information to families involved with the child protective system about their legal rights.

Transportation. MAINE has long been concerned about transportation problems faced by low income people, particularly those living in rural areas. It costs more than many families have to keep a car on the road. Yet few in Maine today can maintain a job without one. This session, *Senator Sharon Treat (D. Gardiner) (a Maine NOW member)* will introduce legislation that calls for action on this issue. Senator Treat's goal is to provide greater access to transportation for low income people while at the same time reducing air pollution from older, less dependable vehicles.

Electric Utilities. MAINE has also been concerned about protecting access to essential utilities - like electricity -- for low income people. MAINE is part of a larger group of organizations, including CMP, that is supporting a bill to create a state-wide low income electric program.

This program will help people with

their electric bills so that no low income household has to pay more than 11% of their income on electricity. This is like today's program run by CMP. (CMP, Maine Public Service and Bangor Hydro-electric currently each operate a different program.)

School Breakfast Program.

State Senator Mary Cathcart (*Maine NOW member*) at the urging of the Maine Coalition for Food Security (871-8266) has submitted legislation that will provide financial incentive to create a School Breakfast program at any high need school that does not have one. 80 Maine schools do not serve breakfast that have 30% of their students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Contact MCFS for more information.

Early Childhood Education and Child Care.

There are numerous bills in this legislative session that focus on helping families and communities raise healthy, safe children ready to learn. *Start ME Right*, a coalition of providers, advocates and legislators (*among them Maine NOW members Sen. Susan Longley and Rep. Tina Baker*) will introduce several bills aimed at:

- ♦ supporting parents with home visits LD 956;
- ♦ providing quality child care;
- ♦ teaching parenting skill in schools and communities; and
- ♦ encouraging businesses and communities to help.

Public Hearings on Child Care and Early Childhood Education bills: Monday 2/22 & Tues. 2/23. Call Legislative Information for times & place 287-1692.

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN



Maine's Leading Feminist Grassroots Organization
Phone Number: 797-8508



Maine State Coordinator - Rachel Lowe 737-2329
Assistant State Coordinator - Cynthia Phinney 778-9506
Scribe - Joyce Blakney 825-3962
Treasurer - Annie Lunt 883-1195

Task Force/Coalition Contacts

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Computer Wizards - JoAnne Dauphinee 989-3306
Consumers For Affordable Health Care-VACANCY
Dirigo Alliance - Beth Edmonds 865-3869
Lesbian Rights Task Force - Janet May 862-5907
Maine Choice Coalition - Kim Simmons 829-3360
Maine NOW Phone Coordinator - Annie Lunt 883-1195
Maine NOW PAC Treasurer - JoAnne Dauphinee 989-3306
Maine NOW Times - VACANCY
Women's Legislative Agenda Coalition - Chris Rusnov 873-0878
Maine Association of Interdependent Neighborhoods - Chris Rusnov 873-0878

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GREATER BANGOR NOW
87 Sunset Strip, Brewer, ME 04412
Coordinator - JoAnne Dauphinee 989-3306
Meets second Monday of each month

GREATER FARMINGTON NOW
P.O.Box 375, Farmington, ME 04938
Coordinator - Aimee DesRoches 778-6107

GREATER PORTLAND NOW
P.O.Box 4012, Portland, ME 04101
Contact - Kim Simmons 829-3360
Call for meeting schedule.

e-mail feminists:
Cynthia Phinney cynth@gwi.net



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Our vision is to empower women to take feminist action to make feminist social change. Our top five priorities are:
ERA, economic justice, eliminating racism, lesbian rights, and reproductive freedom. **JOIN US!**
MAINE NOW, P.O. BOX 4012, Portland, ME 04101. Make check payable to MAINE NOW.

NAME (Please PRINT) _____ PHONE _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS _____

RACIAL/ETHNIC BACKGROUND (optional) _____ to help us analyze our organization's diversity.

CHAPTER (see above) _____ If there isn't a chapter near you, leave this space blank and we will enroll you as an at-large member.

Dues rate includes membership at the national, state & local level.

\$ _____ dues enclosed. \$35 Regular Dues. A sliding scale of \$20 - 34 is available, if you need it.

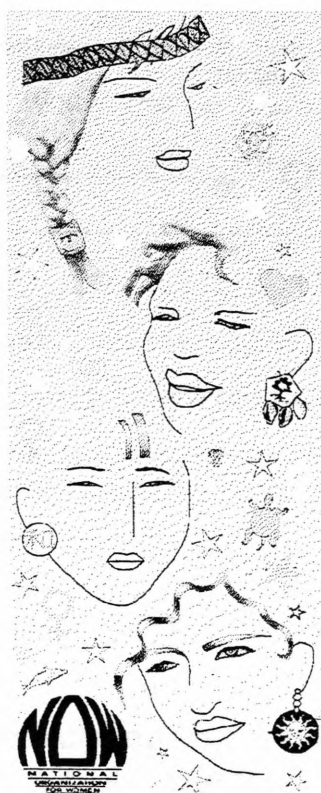
\$ _____ additional contribution enclosed. \$ _____ Political Action Committee contribution. Payable to Maine NOW PAC.

I would like to be a sustainer, donating \$ _____ per month. (\$5 minimum per month)

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Celebrating Our Sisterhood!

Northeast Region Women of Color and Allies Summit,
June 5 & 6, 1999.

Empire State Plaza Convention Center, Albany, New York.

Organized by the Northeast Region National Organization for Women.

Dear Friend,

We invite you to join with us in Celebrating Our Sisterhood! June 5-6, 1999. Featured speaker: Marcia Ann Gillespie, Editor In Chief, Ms Magazine. This summit will bring together women of color and supportive allies from the Northeast to discuss current concerns and future strategies.

For more information contact:

*Renee Berry-Huffman (207) 772-3368 RBHJustice@aol.com
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