

January 28, 2020

Dear Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services;

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has advocated for public policy which increases the health, wellness, safety, and economic security of Maine women and girls, with a focus on the most marginalized populations and communities.

We are here today **in support of LD 1948, "An Act To Prohibit, Except in Emergency Situations, the Performance without Consent of Pelvic Examinations on Unconscious or Anesthetized Patients."** We thank Representative Doudera for sponsoring this important bill.

Before joining the Maine Women's Lobby recently, I worked for the Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault, and for 11 years represented MECASA on Maine's Sexual Assault Forensic Examiner Advisory Board. The work of the anti-sexual violence movement is to explore how we change systems and structures to ensure that people's bodies are respected. We are dedicated to the idea that consent is a value which can be developed from the earliest ages and included in every part of our culture.

Anyone who has ever had the opportunity to receive a pelvic exam will tell you that it is personal. Very personal. It's the kind of health care procedure that one should understand is occurring, and why. The very fact that such an invasive act has been routinely performed in the past without consent and without medical indication is a sign of the extent to which consent has not been understood or valued in our culture.

Most medical establishments – from the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American College of Osteopathic Obstetricians & Gynecologists and the American Urogynecologic Society – have indicated that these exams should not occur without informed consent. Indeed, such consent may already be a part of the practice of virtually all Maine health care providers. Still, there are occasions when we use the infrastructure of policies to ensure that our values transition from general concepts to actual cultural change, and this should be one of them.

We can build a culture of consent – where all of our community members understand that their bodies are their own, that even doctors or coaches or people in authority do not have a right to engage in deeply personal procedures without consent or medical necessity – by ensuring that our policies reflect our values and promote a culture of consent.

Thank you for your time, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Destie Hohman Sprague, Executive Director  
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