

Testimony of Whitney Parrish
Maine Women's Lobby
In support of LD 149
An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Provide Student Debt Forgiveness To Support
Workforce Attraction and Retention
May 9, 2019

Senator Herbig, Representative Daughtry, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business: my name is Whitney Parrish, Director of Policy and Program for the Maine Women's Lobby. The Maine Women's Lobby is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, statewide membership organization devoted to raising the economic, social, and political status of Maine's 678,000 women and girls.

I am pleased to speak to you today in strong support of LD 149, *An Act To Authorize a General Fund Bond Issue To Provide Student Debt Forgiveness To Support Workforce Attraction and Retention*.

According to a 2016 report from the American Association of University Women (AAUW), women hold nearly two-thirds of the outstanding student debt in the United States, which is nearly \$900 billion as of mid-2018.¹ The report revealed that women take on more, and larger, student loans; women are often balancing parenting and caregiving while completing coursework, which results in the acquisition of more loans and debt. Additionally, because of the gender pay gap and the industries in which they are employed, women pay down debt more slowly and accrue more interest. Of course, we also know that many women are unable to finish their college degrees for many reasons, including childbirth, caregiving, and being the sole earner of their family. This also limits their capacity to pay down their debt.

This is not different in Maine. According to a 2018 survey by the Maine Center for Economic Policy, 74% of women under the age of 35 said they struggle to pay their student loans, where only 35% of men do.² Nearly 80% of women with student loan debt in Maine are mothers.³ Within the survey, 93% of female-identified respondents reported that they experienced at least one "bad outcome" as a result of student loan debt. These bad outcomes include putting off a necessary medical appointment, having wages garnished, or putting off paying for retirement.⁴

Generations across the lifespan in a crisis. Student loan debt alleviation is one solution to ensuring that we can become more economically secure and truly invest in our state. We strongly urge you to vote ought to pass on LD 149. Thank you for your time.

¹ "Women's Student Debt Crisis in the United States." American Association of University Women. 2018. Accessed at <https://www.aauw.org/research/deeper-in-debt/>

² "Banners from a Statewide Phone and Online Survey of 400 Adults with Education Debt in Maine." Maine Center for Economic Policy. 2018. <https://www.mecep.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/MECEP-CRL-Poll-Methodology-and-Crosstabs.pdf>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.