



# Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

Testimony of Whitney Parrish

Maine Women's Lobby

In support of LDs 51, 52, 109, 407, 437, 1281, 1591, 1611, 1243, and 1617

May 9, 2019

Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services: 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 support of LDs 51, 52, 109, 407, 437, 1281, 1591, 1611, 1243, and in strong support of LD 1617, *An Act To Create a Single-payer Health Care Program in Maine*.

For over forty years, our organization has focused on four key policy areas: freedom from violence, freedom from discrimination, access to health care, and the overarching issue that informs the others: economic security. We believe that these bills, and particularly LD 1617, touches upon each of these issues and would materially improve the lives and economic security of all people in Maine, especially women and their families.

While the Affordable Care Act and actions taken by the state legislature have immensely improved coverage opportunities for women, the system remains deeply flawed and the health care needs of women continue to be sidelined or segregated from the conversation. Chronic conditions are on the rise for women of childbearing age in Maine<sup>i</sup>, maternal mortality rates are rising<sup>ii</sup>, and major disparities for women, particularly women of color, rural women, and low-income women, persist throughout our state.

Insured women are more likely to access preventive screenings like mammograms and pap tests than non-insured women, if only because accessing these lifesaving tests can mean not feeding or clothing one's child. Additionally, it costs money to take time off from work, let alone money to spend on a visit to the doctor or hospital. Providing evidence-based preventive care for annual mammograms, well care visits, birth control, and breast-feeding support lessens the burdens not only on patients, but also on the

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<sup>i</sup> Increasing Chronic Conditions putting more moms, babies at risk. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/11/171107180045.htm>.

<sup>ii</sup> Maine Maternal, Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Panel. 2016. Retrieved from <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/population-health/mch/documents/2016-MFIMRLegislative-Report.pdf>.

295 Water Street, Suite 10, Augusta, ME 04330 • 207.622.0851

[wparrish@mainewomen.org](mailto:wparrish@mainewomen.org)

[www.mainewomen.org](http://www.mainewomen.org)



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health care and medical systems and our economy. When a woman doesn't have to depend on her abusive partner's health care coverage, she may be more able to leave a violent situation. When a woman can insure herself and her family, she is more likely to achieve economic security. Single payer health care will actively work to ensure access to nondiscriminatory and necessary medical treatment for individuals who might not otherwise have access to it, whether through not meeting qualification guidelines for Medicaid or exorbitant expenses attached to coverage, premiums, and co-payments.

We have an incredible opportunity to modernize our health care system and ensure that no Mainer is left behind. If we can close disparities in health care coverage in Maine and make it truly accessible to everyone, we will create a more thriving and inviting place now and into the future. We strongly urge you to consider this health care reform bundle favorably and work with sponsors and stakeholders to develop a system that creates no barrier health care that every one of us deserves. Thank you for your time.

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