



Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

Testimony of Whitney Parrish

Maine Women's Lobby

In support of LD 1245

An Act To Protect Victims of Domestic and Sexual Violence in Certain Provisions under the Maine Human Rights Act

May 6, 2019

Senator Carpenter, Representative Bailey, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary: 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 LD 1245, *An Act To Protect Victims of Domestic and Sexual Violence in Certain Provisions under the Maine Human Rights Act*.

It is well known in the violence response and prevention world that survivors of domestic and sexual violence not only deal with the acute and ongoing trauma caused by abuse and victimization, but they are also at increased risk of discrimination and retaliation in the workplace. Work place policies addressing domestic and sexual violence often fall short of fully protecting a worker or do not even exist, especially regarding reasonable accommodation for relocating to new housing or seeking mental health treatment, as well as working with the survivor to keep them safe in the work place. There are also situations where a survivor may be blamed for the actions of their abuser, and they may be fired due to fear of that individual showing up at the work place. Additionally, a person may not be hired because an employer fears that they will bring "drama" to the work place.

Prior to working with you here, I was employed as a domestic violence educator who worked with employers to develop comprehensive work place policies to support and accommodate survivors of violence. More often than not, I was contacted because an employer did not know how to handle a situation where they wanted to support a survivor, but did not know how. The situation most vivid in my mind involved a health care worker at a nursing home who frequently showed up to work with bruises and ligature marks around her hands and feet. She did not show up for two days, and her employer called the State Police to do a well check on her. That same day, they terminated her employment due to fear of her husband, lack of a domestic violence work place policy, and, presumably, lack of explicit protections from discrimination and retaliation under the law. I often think about her and wonder how things could have been different if certain protections had been in place. I also think about the countless

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

wparrish@mainewomen.org

www.mainewomen.org



Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

survivors who continue to be inadvertently or intentionally discriminated against because their employer does not take the time to adopt policies that will protect them, or they do not feel the need to for any number of reasons.

In our efforts to eradicate domestic and sexual violence, we must always ensure that survivors are able to live the lives they want and deserve to live, complete with the opportunity to remain in their jobs and seek new employment or housing without fear of their trauma and victimization following them indefinitely. We believe that LD 1245 is a step toward this goal. We strongly urge you to vote ought to pass. Thank you for your time.

295 Water Street, Suite 10, Augusta, ME 04330 • 207.622.0851
wparrish@mainewomen.org
www.mainewomen.org