

Maine Women's Lobby

THE VOICE OF MAINE WOMEN

Testimony of Whitney Parrish

Maine Women's Lobby

In support of LD 433

RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine To Explicitly Prohibit
Discrimination Based on the Sex of an Individual

March 7, 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 so pleased to speak to you today in support of LD 433, *RESOLUTION, Proposing an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine To Explicitly Prohibit Discrimination Based on the Sex of an Individual*.

Today, you will hear from dedicated, selfless advocates whose entire lives and careers have been devoted to gaining equal rights for women; some of whom courageously founded the Maine Women's Lobby with this very issue in mind 41 years ago. We give heartfelt thanks to them as we continue this fight today.

We are often asked, "But don't women have equal rights and protections under the law? Why are we still talking about this?" The answer is that while we have some laws that protect against sex discrimination, they are difficult to enforce and can be overturned by Congress. Put simply, women do not have equal protection at the core of our Constitutional law. The Equal Rights Amendment aims to rectify this, giving equality strict respect in the courts and bringing our Constitution into the 21st century.

Maine women are typically paid 82 cents for every dollar paid to their male counterparts.ⁱ For women of color, this disparity is even steeper.ⁱⁱ If the annual gender wage gap were eliminated, a woman working full time in Maine would have enough money, on average, to purchase 11.6 months of child care, 9.6 months of rent, and 0.8 additional years of tuition and fees from a four-year public university.ⁱⁱⁱ Despite the passages of the federal Equal Pay Act and Maine's Equal Pay Act, we continue to see

ⁱ "America's Women and the Wage Gap." National Partnership for Women and Families. September 2018. Accessed at <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/resources/workplace/fair-pay/americas-women-and-the-wage-gap.pdf>

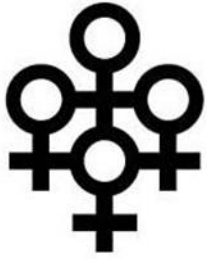
ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ "What's the Wage Gap in the States?" National Partnership for Women and Families. 2018. Accessed at <http://www.nationalpartnership.org/our-work/workplace/4-2018-wage-gap-map.html>

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loopholes in these laws that make them challenging to win in court. Vast wage disparities impact the ability of Maine women and families to truly thrive.

Domestic violence is disproportionately committed against women (82%), compared to men (18%).^{iv} In Maine, a domestic violence assault is reported to law enforcement every 2 hours and 5 minutes,^v and for as long as many current and former domestic violence advocates can remember, the homicide rate in Maine related to domestic violence has hovered at a staggering 50%.^{vi} Gender-based violence is a public health crisis in Maine and across the country, even with Violence Against Women Act legal protections, which have not always proven effective in court.

Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments made tremendous strides in opening equitable educational opportunity for women, but as we have recently seen, vicious attacks on Title IX protections for students regarding sexual assault and harassment remedies stand to leave survivors of these heinous crimes with far fewer legal protections.^{vii} We can and must do what we can to protect them.

It is 2019. It is time to say loudly and clearly that all people deserve equal protection in our Constitution. It goes without saying that it is not only long overdue but needed. We strongly urge you to vote ought to pass on LD 433. Thank you for your time.

^{iv} "Nonfatal Domestic Violence, 2003-2012." Truman & Morgan. 2014.

^v "Crime in Maine 2017." Maine Dept. of Public Safety. Accessed at https://www.maine.gov/dps/cim/crime_in_maine/2017pdf/030%20Violent.pdf

^{vi} "On the Path of Prevention: The 11th Biennial Report of the Maine Domestic Abuse Homicide Review Panel." 2016. Accessed at: <https://www.maine.gov/ag/docs/2016%20Report%20of%20the%20Domestic%20Abuse%20Homicide%20Review%20Panel.pdf>

^{vii} "The Attack on Title IX." 2019. <https://www.aauw.org/article/the-attack-on-title-ix/>

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