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A Report on Maine Women's Labor and Economic Security

MAINE PERMANENT
COMMISSION ON THE
STATUS OF WOMEN

BIENNIAL REPORT
2024



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I. INTRODUCTION

This report pulls together information from publicly available data sources to tell the story of Maine women's labor and economic security.

As the cost of living rises¹ and Maine residents find it challenging to afford basic expenses,² it is in Maine's interest to ensure residents can enjoy economic security, work in safe and supportive environments, and go through each phase of life with enough resources to be resilient to challenges. **The Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (MePCSW) believes this is a critical moment to address the gender wage gap, to secure economic well-being for women who provide unpaid care, and to promote policy and culture change that advances inclusivity and protects workers from discrimination, gender-based violence, and harassment.** We must underscore the value of women's labor in traditional and nontraditional industries, as well as in the unpaid family caregiving roles on which our state economy relies. We must also embrace the intrinsic, human value of all Maine residents outside their economic contributions or their capacity for paid employment. MePCSW sees this as key framing for a report on women's labor, particularly in the face of Maine's changing demographics³ and the urgency of the workforce challenges we are facing as a state. **All Maine residents and families deserve economic security and should be supported in meeting their basic needs.**

Direct care work is one industry highlighted in this report. Maine is experiencing an extremely tight labor market in the direct care service industry.⁴ This has implications for the women who make up the bulk of the direct care workforce, the women who disproportionately need direct care services, and the women who pick up the slack when caregiving services are not available. This issue sits at the nexus of Maine's aging population, our societal undervaluing of care work, and our reliance on women to step in when systems fall short.

Traditionally male-dominated industries, like construction,⁵ are also experiencing a tight labor market and are looking to nontraditional workers to fill in the gaps. In May 2024, Maine Gov. Janet Mills issued an executive order⁶ aimed at supporting more women in the construction industry. This comes at a time when there is a national push⁷ for more women in construction and the skilled trades, driven in part by federal infrastructure investments. MePCSW has partnered with the Maine Department of Labor to collect data and stories from Maine women in the trades — and girls interested in trades careers — about what they need to succeed in these industries.

The U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau recognizes that as traditionally homogenous workplaces become more diverse there can be increased risk of gender-based violence and harassment — particularly for women, Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) workers, and LGBTQ+ individuals, who might be the "only" in their workplace.⁸ To accompany efforts at enhancing gender parity across industries, we need strategies that support the safety and inclusion of non-traditional workers. In Maine, there have been recent wins that support women and all working parents, including much-needed investments in child care systems and infrastructure, and the passage of a paid family and medical leave law in 2023. MePCSW applauds these achievements — but there is more to do.

This report pulls together information from publicly available data sources to tell the story of Maine women's labor and economic security. After each section of this report, we also highlight key recommendations for action. Many of these recommendations draw from the strength, scholarship, and expertise of the myriad Maine organizations that are aiming to build a more equitable future for women, girls, and all Maine residents.





Our Approach: Research, Action, Limitations, and Impact

In State statute,⁹ MePCSW is tasked with advising and consulting with the Governor and the Legislature to assist them in improving opportunities for women in Maine. We do this through activities like convening gatherings, conducting research, sharing information, and advocating on behalf of Maine women and girls. We see a need for research and analysis that highlights gender disparities, tells the stories of Maine women, and identifies opportunities for policymakers.

In this report, we have sought to equip lawmakers with the information they need to advance policy solutions that strengthen Maine’s economy and women’s economic security.

Acknowledging Limitations

We acknowledge the imperfect nature of our current data systems, particularly when we are attempting to capture the experiences of small population groups in Maine that experience some of the starkest disparities. For example, BIPOC parents are underrepresented in Maine’s Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS), making it challenging to analyze these data for reliable conclusions about perinatal health disparities. A similar challenge in data analysis arises from the U.S. Census Bureau use of the category “Black/African American,” which makes it difficult to disaggregate data about Maine’s African immigrant population and Black American population. Additionally, most of the data in this report sorts the Maine population into categories of either male or female. We know this does not reflect the diverse gender identities and expressions of the Maine population — particularly among youth and young adults.¹⁰ For Maine’s rural, immigrant, LGBTQ+, and BIPOC populations, **baseline data is lacking**, and it can be challenging to get a clear picture of on-the-ground realities and structural inequities using our current data systems. **This impacts resource allocation for the communities and individuals who have the highest needs.**

Opportunities for Change

We are pleased to be working with our colleagues in the Department of Secretary of State, as well as the Department of Administrative and Financial Services, and the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations, to advance more interoperable and equitable data systems in Maine state government. This work builds on the report MePCSW released in 2022, “Count Us In: Maine Women, Data, and the Care Economy”¹¹ and offers an opportunity to build systems that more fairly allocate resources across the state.



Impact and What is at Stake



There are countless examples of how Maine women are impacted by lack of resources. The following examples are not meant to provide a comprehensive study. Instead, they highlight the stories that may not show up in our current data systems and ground these issues in the real lives of Maine residents.

- A single mother has experienced domestic abuse and is working (often alone) to establish a safer life for herself and her children. She does not have work experience or a formal education, and she doesn't speak English. Due to language and cultural barriers, existing systems of services and supports are not accessible to her, and do not feel relevant to her needs. Resources like child care and transportation, which are pre-requisites for employment, feel out of reach.
- A 57-year-old woman moved in with her father when her mother passed, relocating and giving up a job she liked in order to care for him. Two years in, she is struggling with depression, as well as some resentment and a desire to resume her life and go back to full-time work. She can't get him to agree to pay for additional help and her mental health is suffering as she experiences feelings of anger and guilt.
- A young girl is living with her family in a home that is contaminated with lead paint. She has experienced developmental impacts and delays, and her family has not been able to access early childhood interventions. As she enters elementary school, her behavioral health needs are not being met and it is already impacting her academically. Her parents are concerned, but are unsure about what to do and lack formal education themselves. They have had a similar experience with one of her older siblings, and are concerned that she will not be prepared for future educational and career opportunities.
- A woman in her mid-60s who cares for her disabled mother sometimes must miss work in order to provide care when other care options aren't available. Her current job provides flexibility so she can meet her mother's needs, but she has been unable to advance in her career because other roles might not be as flexible. This has had a negative impact on her income and ability to save for retirement.
- A 76-year-old woman is a caregiver for her 81-year-old sister, taking her to medical appointments and providing daily care. She describes missing exercise classes and lunches with friends. Her physical and mental health have suffered as a result.

There are common themes throughout these examples that illustrate the emotional, financial, and health-related impacts many women face when confronted with insufficient resources, lacking support, and intensive care responsibilities. These examples further highlight the impacts on Maine's workforce and labor market.

While we work to improve the way data is collected and used at the state level, we encourage policymakers to talk with and listen to constituents and the community-based organizations who support them.



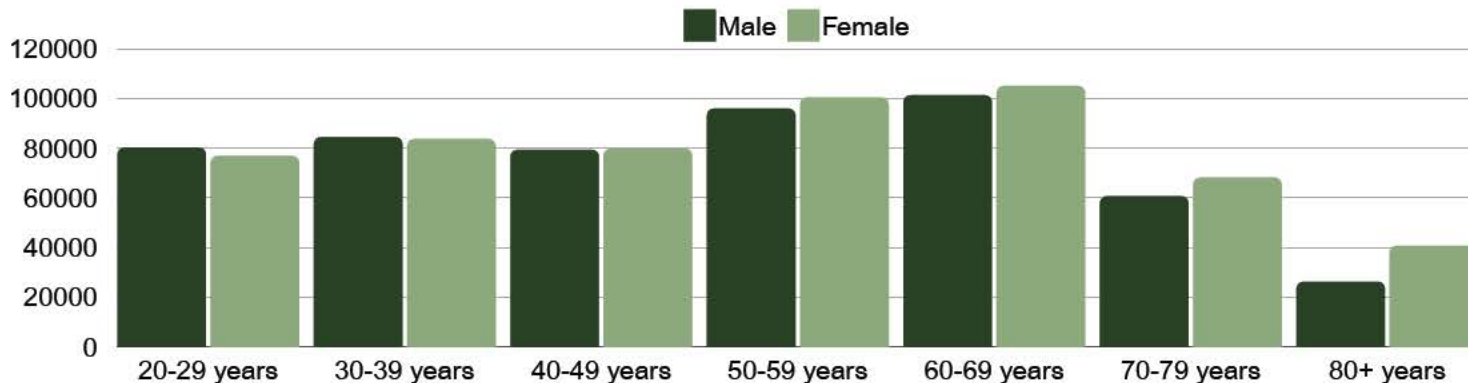
THE WOMEN OF MAINE¹²

710,596 women live in Maine — about **51%** of the state population.

Source: American Community Survey 2023 1-year estimates, unless otherwise indicated



Women make up the majority of Maine's oldest residents



Education and Economic Status

High School Diploma or Higher

Women: **95.3%**
Men: 94.5%

Bachelor's Degree or Higher

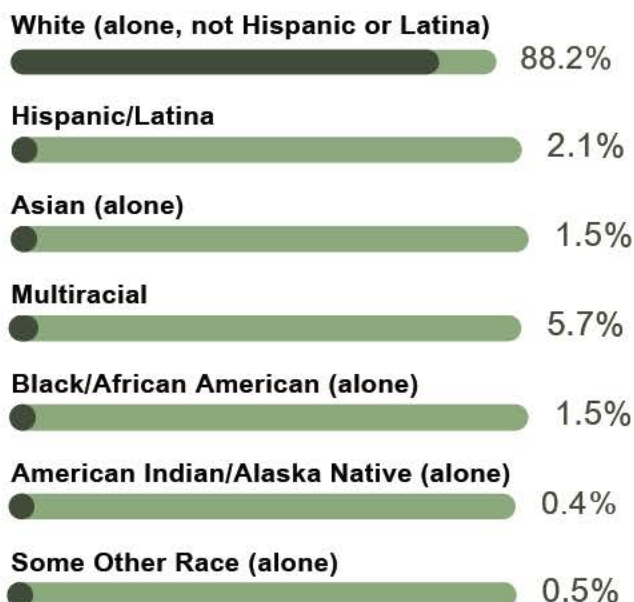
Women: **39.6%**
Men: 34.2%

11.9% of Maine women have incomes below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL)

Compared to Women in New Hampshire (8.3%), Vermont (11.5%), Massachusetts (10.8%), and 9.9% of Maine men.¹³

Source: American Community Survey 2018-2022 5-Year Estimate

Racial Diversity Amongst Women



Gender and Sexual Orientation Diversity Amongst Women

Source: The Williams Institute, UCLA School of Law. (2019). LGBT Demographic Data and Demographics Interactive.

5.3% of Maine women identify as LGBTQ+

Compared to 6.3% in Vermont, 5.1% in New Hampshire, and 6.0% in Massachusetts.¹⁴

Marital Status of Women

*Maine women are more likely than Maine men to be widowed or divorced

Marital Status

Women: **49.8%** Married*
Men: 52.9% Married

II. MAINE WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE: A DATA OVERVIEW

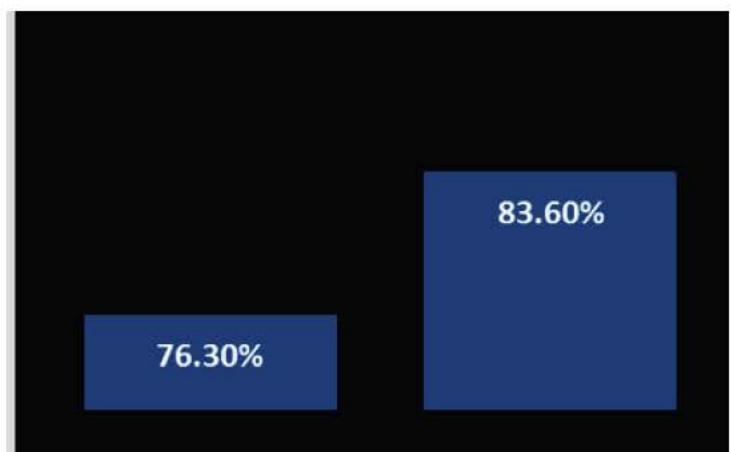
Though many U.S. states have seen increased employment rates among women, the percentage of Maine women participating in the workforce has not grown significantly over the past 20 years.¹⁶ The U.S. has also lagged behind Canada, where there has been a consistently higher rate of labor force participation among the female population since 2000.¹⁵ The difference can be explained in part by lack of supports for U.S. workers, especially when participation in the workforce comes into competition with care responsibilities. **With Maine employers facing a tight labor market, it is in Maine's economic interest to address barriers to women's participation in the workforce.**¹⁶

“There are several factors contributing to the higher rate of labor force participation among working age people in Canada and other peer countries ... Research suggests some of the most important relate to the relative lack of employment supports for U.S. workers, especially for women ... The need to care and provide supports for children, people with disabilities, and older adults is a role that still falls disproportionately on women ... Through the year ending October 2, 2023, an average of 19,600 women and 2,500 men each week listed either child care or care for older adults as their main barrier to employment, meaning that the responsibility of care was almost eight times as likely to fall on women as on men.”

– State of Working Maine 2023, Maine Center for Economic Policy¹⁵

Women in Maine participate in the labor force at a lower rate than men.

As the above quote suggests, this is partially driven by disproportionate care responsibilities and insufficient access to supports like affordable, high-quality child and elder care.





This variation in labor force participation tracks across racial and ethnic populations in Maine, with the exception of the American Indian and Alaska Native population which shows a higher labor force participation rate among the female population. However, we encourage a cautious approach to data interpretation due to high rates of uncertainty for smaller population groups in Maine. Population totals have been included below.

Maine labor force participation by sex and race/ethnicity (age 16 - 64)

Race/Ethnicity	Female			Male		
	Total	In Labor Force	Percent in Labor Force	Total	In Labor Force	Percent in Labor Force
White (alone, not Hispanic or Latino)	390,161	292,688	75.0%	388,879	308,569	79.3%
Black/African American (alone)	5,755	4,302	74.8%	8,561	6,519	76.1%
American Indian/ Alaska Native (alone)	2,153	1,605	74.5%	2,294	1,546	67.4%
Asian (alone)	8,845	6,600	74.6%	4,078	3,404	83.5%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander (alone)	N/A*	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Some Other Race (alone)	2,667	1,935	72.6%	3,835	2,942	76.7%
Multiracial	24,851	17,637	71%	25,034	21,023	84%
Hispanic or Latino	10,945	7,716	70.5%	10,906	8,947	82%

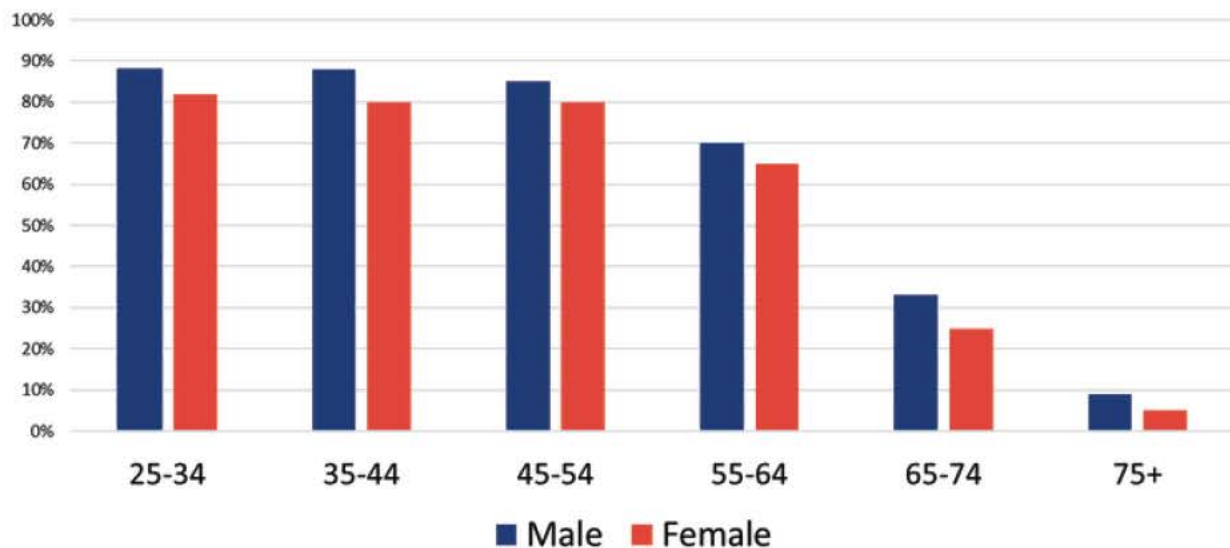
Source: American Community Survey 2018-2022 5-year estimates
 *N/A due to small population sample and high uncertainty in estimates





As Maine’s demographics continue to shift toward an older population overall, there is increased interest in supporting and retaining an older workforce.^{18 19} At 65%, Maine has a slightly higher labor force participation rate for women ages 55-64 than the national average.¹⁷ Women 25-34 and 35-44 also exceed national average rates. However, across most age groups below, women participate in the labor force at a lower rate than men.

Labor force participation rate by age and sex in Maine



Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-year estimates

In 2023, 39.1% of working women in Maine were employed in the Education and Health Care sectors (see next page). Working men in Maine were not as highly concentrated in a specific industry sector.



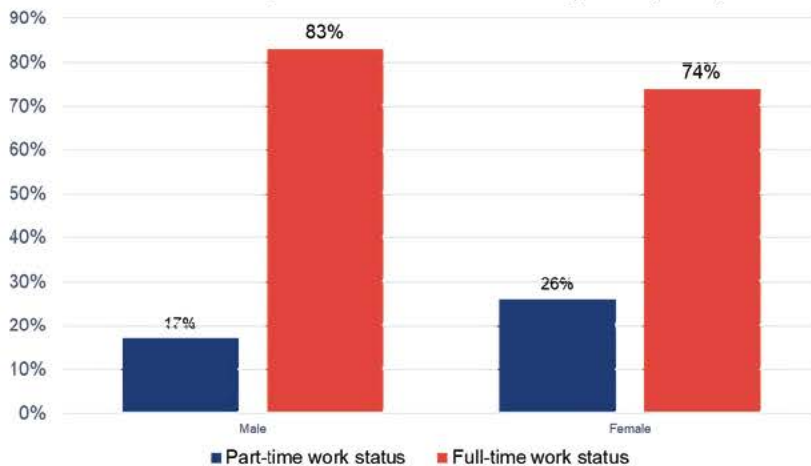


Maine workforce industry distribution by sex (2023)

Industry Sector	Percent of Maine's female population working in the specified sector	Percent of Maine's male population working in the specified sector
Education and Health Care	39.1%	13.3%
Wholesale and Retail Trade	14.0%	16.8%
Professional and Business	11.5%	12.1%
Leisure and Hospitality	8.4%	8.3%
Financial Activities	7.6%	5.3%
Manufacturing	5.4%	12.1%
Public Administration	4.6%	4.7%
Other	4.4%	5.5%
Construction	1.6%	12.9%
Transportation and Utilities	1.3%	4.4%
Agriculture and Related	1.0%	3.0%
Information	0.9%	1.3%
Mining	0.2%	0.3%

Source: Current Population Survey (CPS) - United States Census Bureau

Full-time vs part-time work status by sex (2023)



Women in Maine are more likely than men to be employed on a part-time basis, often due to disproportionate caregiving responsibilities for children or other family members.

Source: United States Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Note: Employed persons are classified as full- or part-time workers on the basis of their usual weekly hours at all jobs, regardless of the number of hours they are at work during the reference week. Persons absent from work are classified according to their usual status. Includes some persons at work 35 hours or more, classified by their reason for working part time.



Key Recommendations

- **Support the employment and financial security of older women in Maine:**

- Recognize the key role older adults play in supporting the Maine economy by strengthening protections²⁰ and removing barriers for older workers.
 - **Example:** Under federal law, age is one factor that can be used to assess and set health insurance premiums – generally leading to higher premiums for older adults due to increased health risks associated with age.²¹ Particularly for smaller employers, the higher costs associated with hiring and insuring older adults may be a barrier to employing older workers.²² Maine could consider opportunities to address this barrier, including through the study of outcomes in New York and Vermont, where state laws prohibit the use of age in determining insurance premium costs.²⁰
- Continue to build on existing work at the State of Maine to maintain recognition as an Age-Friendly Employer²³ and continue to promote existing resources for older workers, including the Maine Department of Labor’s Workforce Resources for Older Adults.²⁴
- Leverage recommendations from the Governor’s Cabinet on Aging,¹⁹ the Maine State Chamber of Commerce¹⁸ and the Maine Council on Aging²⁵ to build age-friendly workplaces, actively recruit older workers to rejoin the workforce, and connect older adults returning to the workforce with the training, skills, and support they may need.

- **Encourage strategies to recruit and retain a diverse workforce in Maine:**

- Identify opportunities, including in partnership with the newly created Maine Office of New Americans, to better meet the needs of immigrant women entering the workforce.²⁶ A report from the Maine State Economist’s Office³ found that from 2021-2022, 61% of the state’s population gain (more than 8,000 people) came from BIPOC populations. The report noted that to “be successful, Maine must not only welcome racially and ethnically diverse communities to the state, but also work consistently to make its economy more equitable and inclusive for these populations.” Recommendations from the Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations²⁷ highlight opportunities to support a diverse health care workforce – particularly one that supports improved perinatal health outcomes.
 - **Example:** In Her Presence established Maine’s first formal cultural doula program. The program offers doula trainings for immigrant women who can help patients communicate with medical providers across language and cultural barriers while also providing emotional, physical, and social support. Programs like this – if supported and sustained – can help build a diverse health workforce, a more effective health system, and improved perinatal health outcomes for Maine residents.



Spotlight: Women in Construction

“If there’s two women engineers on the site, they will stay. If there’s one, they may look for something else to do.” -Experienced civil engineer interviewed about women working the trades

Currently, women represent only 15% of the construction workforce in Maine. Gender-based violence and harassment are still major barriers to women joining the construction industry – and staying there. A 2023 report from the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission²⁸ found that women and workers of color experience pervasive harassment²⁹ on construction work sites. As federal infrastructure investments flow into Maine over the next few years, there is an opportunity to support positive change in the construction industry while meeting the needs of construction employers.

In May 2024, Gov. Mills signed an executive order with five action items to increase women’s employment in construction and trades careers:

1. Collect baseline data
2. Consult with industry partners about opportunities and barriers to hiring women
3. Strengthen the connection between workforce program participants and construction employers
4. Gather workforce data from contractors
5. Pursue grant opportunities

MePCSW partnered with Maine Department of Labor (MDOL) to conduct a series of focus groups and interviews with women who are currently working in construction and the trades. These conversations and surveys helped identify the barriers below.



Jennifer Wilkey, MePCSW member and woodworker

Commonly Identified Barriers to Women’s Construction Employment

- Many women workers like their co-workers and feel supported — but describe **subcontractors** or people at supply stores not treating them with respect.
- **Workplace culture** in the construction industry still has a bad reputation, especially if there’s only one woman on the worksite. This reputation can be a deterrent.
- Supervisors **may not encourage professional development** for women workers.
- When **microaggressions** occur on the worksite, it can leave women constantly feeling the need to prove themselves.
- It is challenging to manage changing worksite schedules while **managing a family**, particularly when trying to access child care solutions.
- There are **limited opportunities for exposure** to these careers in schools for younger folks.
- There is a persistent need to **overcome stereotypes** and emphasize that construction work is not just about brute strength — there are many different career paths.

Adapted from 2024 work by the Maine Department of Labor and the Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Women, the result of interviews and focus groups with ~50 women in the construction industry.

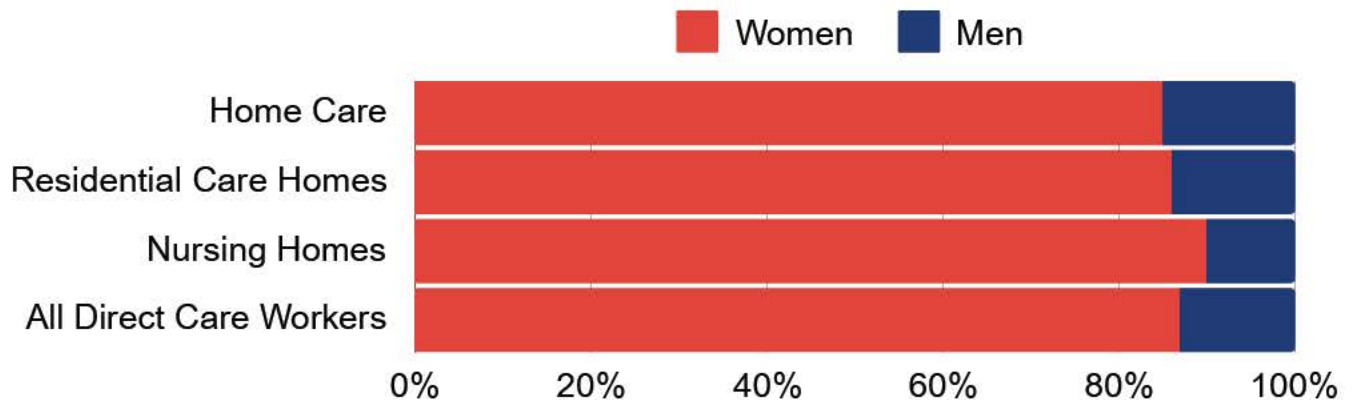
MePCSW, in continued partnership with MDOL, is leading efforts to address gender-based violence and harassment in the construction industry, with a focus on key partnerships, employer outreach, education, and training. MePCSW is also working with partners to better understand the unique challenges that parents in the construction industry face when accessing child care. MePCSW will continue exploring opportunities for further child care investment, including for rural, BIPOC, and immigrant women.



III. WOMEN ARE MAINE'S DIRECT CARE WORKFORCE

Women make up the vast majority of the direct care workforce in Maine.³⁰ Additionally, 20% of home health aides in Maine are immigrants – a large share that illustrates the diversity of direct care workers.³¹

Direct care workforce categories by sex



Source: PHI. "Workforce Data Center." Last modified September 2024.
Data Source: This analysis uses the 2018-2022 5-Year Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) from the American Community Survey (ACS).

Worsening workforce shortages in the direct care industry are driven in part by Maine's changing demographics and the field's low wages. A 2007 study found that "Median wages for direct care workers with families are just over the Federal Poverty Level and have not kept pace with inflation, making them uncompetitive with other entry level jobs such as food prep and retail sales."³²

Today, according to the MIT Living Wage Calculator, the hourly rate that an individual person in Maine must earn to support themselves is \$22.04.³³ The median hourly wage for direct care workers in Maine is \$16.47.³⁴ The U.S. Department of Labor Women's Bureau has also found that "home healthcare workers often work alone in their patients' homes, which leaves them more vulnerable to abuse from patients."³⁵ Across Maine industries, nursing and direct health care service provision have some of the highest rates of injury and illness.³⁵

These issues disproportionately impact women in numerous ways. Women in Maine live longer than men and are more likely to need these care services themselves. When services are not available, Maine women are disproportionately likely to drop out of the workforce or take on part-time work to provide unpaid care for family members. Maine women are also more likely to work in these low-paying roles, a reality which drives the gender wage gap and harms women's economic security. While one tool for tackling the ongoing gender pay gap is to encourage women to join higher paying fields like construction (see previous section), there is a dire and growing need for direct care workforce across the state – and an opportunity to meet the needs of the many women working in these critical roles.



Key Recommendations

- **MePCSW applauds recent efforts to implement recommendations from the 2019 Commission to Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues.**³⁶ There has been work to support higher wages for direct care workers through MaineCare rate setting reform,³⁷ as well as bonus payments to help recruit, retain, and stabilize the Home and Community-Based Services workforce, and one-time payments to help facilities recover from COVID-19 pandemic-related challenges. Recruitment efforts have included a Care for ME media campaign, expanded apprenticeship programs in direct care work, and additional resources to help interested workers navigate and afford training and connect with job opportunities.^{19 38} Additionally, the creation of the Maine LongTerm Care Ombudsman Program’s Direct Care and Support Professional Advisory Council³⁹ is a commendable step toward worker-centered solutions to workforce challenges. Maine ranks highly in the PHI Direct Care Workforce State Index⁴⁰ for policies and practices that support workers. **Despite this, there is an urgent need to build on recent momentum and ensure that direct care services are accessible and high-quality, and that workers are well-compensated.**
- **Address Maine’s ongoing direct care workforce shortage and strengthen women’s economic security:**
 - Following a convening in June 2024, Maine’s Essential Care & Support Workforce Partnership released a culminating report and series of recommendations. The recommendations are varied, comprehensive, and include input from a number of cross-sector participants. Recommended activities would enhance worker wages and benefits, improve training infrastructure and access, recruit more men and gender-diverse workers, enhance supports for New Americans, and collect and use additional data.⁴¹
 - Continue to raise the reimbursement rates for direct care workers and improve worker access to health and retirement benefits to incentivize workforce retention and address challenges related to workers approaching the public benefits cliff.⁴
 - Engage with the Maine LongTerm Care Ombudsman Program’s Direct Care and Support Professional Advisory Council and follow upcoming recommendations from the Council to ensure the prioritization of worker-led solutions.



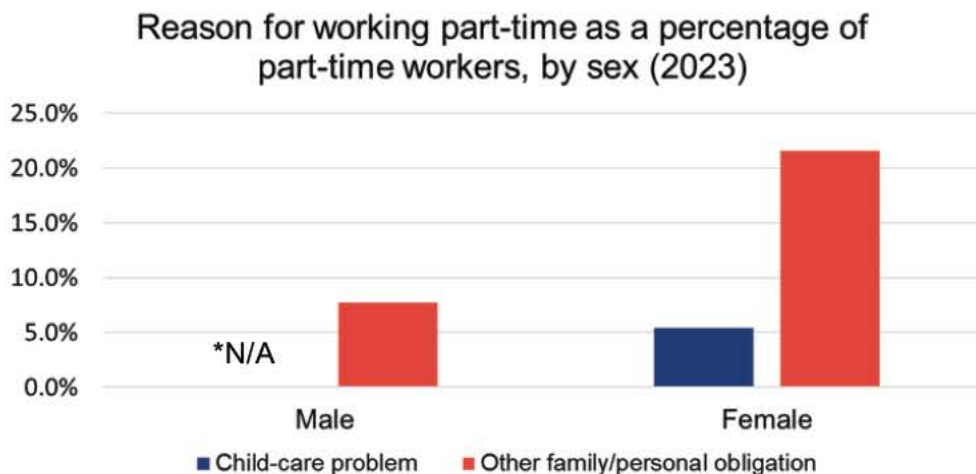
IV. THE LANDSCAPE OF WOMEN'S UNPAID CAREGIVING LABOR

It can be challenging to describe unpaid caregiving work in the same level of detail we use to describe formal labor force participation. Previous MePCSW work identified this as one of several gaps in available data about women's lives in Maine. It is well documented — in Maine and nationally — that unpaid caregiving work largely falls on women, that this is a barrier to paid employment, and that it has a negative impact on women's personal finances⁴² and the Maine economy as a whole. As part of the Maine State Plan on Aging Needs Assessment, researchers conduct a survey of caregivers. In 2019, 86% of the online survey respondents identified as female.⁴³ In the 2024 survey, which included both online and mail-in modalities, slightly over half (52%) of the respondents identified as women.⁷²

Unpaid caregiving work can also occur within care work professions. In a recent survey of Maine doulas, 68.9% of respondents reported that they have supported a client for free at some point in their career — usually in instances where the client would not otherwise be able to pay.⁴⁴

The Connection Between Child Care and Unpaid Labor

In an analysis of U.S. Census Bureau Data from January 2022 - February 2023, the Maine Center for Economic Policy found that **24,000 Mainers cited a lack of available child care as the main reason they were not participating in the labor force.**⁴⁵ Maine women are also more likely than men to cite child care as a barrier to full-time work.



Source: U.S. Current Population Survey 2023, Adapted from "Economic Security of Older Women in Maine"
N/A* = numbers were too low to get an accurate estimate.





The high cost of child care is one key driver of Maine women dropping out of the workforce or opting for part-time work in order to care for their children.

Average annual price of full-time child care in Maine for one child (2023)		
Age of child	Center-based	Family-based
Infant	\$11,960	\$8,580
Toddler	\$11,284	\$7,800

Source: Child Care Aware® of America's Child Care at a Standstill: Price and Landscape Analysis

In addition to affordability, **availability of child care is also a well-documented concern across the state.** In 2023, the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) found that there are not enough licensed child care slots in Maine to provide care and education for all young children who need it. BPC found that Aroostook County has the highest gap in Maine with 2,561 children needing child care and a gap of 565 spaces.⁴⁶ All counties across the state face a gap between the available services and the number of children that need care.⁴⁷ Notably, the BPC analysis did not account for additional gaps caused when child care providers cannot operate at full capacity due to challenges with staffing – the true numbers are likely more dire.

As with other traditionally female-dominated care work professions (see the direct care workforce section above), low pay is a key driver of worker shortages and retention challenges.⁴⁷ This has major economic implications for Maine. **A 2023 study found that the lack of reliable child care for working parents of children under age 3 could cost the state as much as \$403 million annually.**⁴⁸





This issue has been a focal point for lawmakers in recent years, with recent state investments aimed at bolstering the child care workforce and child care providers while also improving affordability for families. **The textbox below lays out recent achievements — but there is more to do to ensure families can access affordable, high quality, culturally appropriate child care.**

What are some approaches Maine is using to address the child care gap and child care affordability concerns for families?

- **Child Care Infrastructure Grants:** One-time funding provided through the Governor’s Maine Jobs and Recovery Program, provided \$15 million in funding for start-up and expansion grants to child care facilities, both center-based and family child care programs.
- **Pre-K Expansion Grants:** One-time funding provided through the Governor’s Maine Jobs and Recovery Program, provided \$10 million in funding for start-up grants to schools for new public pre-K programs and expansion of existing programs. Priority was given to programs working with community partners, such as child care and Head Start.
- **Maine Early Childhood Educator Workforce Salary Supplement Program:** A three-tiered system to provide stipends to educators, encouraging continued education and workforce retention. Individuals with more years of experience and higher levels of education receive higher stipends. General Fund funding for the program is capped at \$30 million per year.
- **The Child Care Affordability Program:** Helps families pay for the cost of child care and has raised the income eligibility requirements, to include families with incomes up to 125% of the state median income (\$103,000 per year for a family of three). **Note:** as of November 30, 2024, the Office of Child and Family Services has had to implement a wait list for this program to stay within the available federal funding.
- **The Head Start program** has raised income eligibility from 100% of the Federal Poverty Level to 185% of the Federal Poverty Level.
- **A Child Care Assistance Program for Child Care Staff:** Created with General Fund dollars to help parents of young children who work in licensed child care programs to pay for child care.

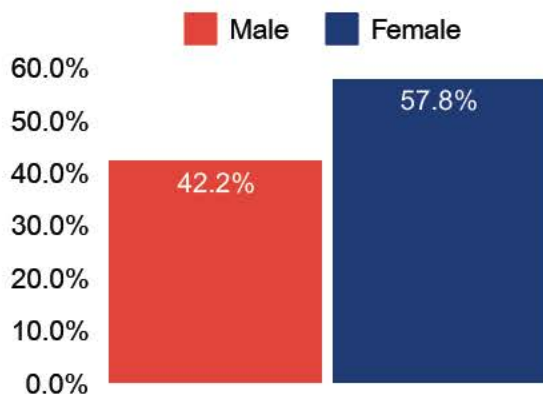




The Role of Grandparents

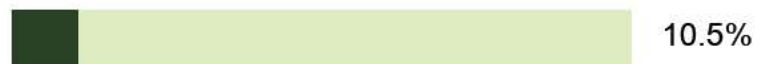
Grandparents are also taking an active role in unpaid caregiving, sometimes foregoing full time work to provide child care or acting as the primary caregiver for grandchildren (often referred to as a “grandfamily” or as “kinship caregiving”). This phenomenon has become more common across the country, driven in part by the opioid crisis as well as other social and economic factors.⁴⁹ **Five thousand Maine grandparents living with their grandchildren have assumed responsibility for them,⁷² with grandmothers more likely than grandfathers to be the primary caregiver for grandchildren under 18.**

Sex of Maine grandparents who are primary caregivers for grandchildren under 18



Poverty rates among grandparents who live with and/or care for grandchildren under 18

Percentage of Maine grandparents living with grandchildren who have incomes below the Federal Poverty Level:



Percentage of Maine grandparents acting as a primary caregiver for grandchildren who have incomes below the Federal Poverty Level:



Source: American Community Survey 2023 1-year estimates, Table S1002

Grandparents who are primary caregivers for their grandchildren are more likely to live in poverty than grandparents who live with their grandchildren but are not solely responsible for their care. These families also face unique challenges as they navigate systems for young children while simultaneously navigating systems for older adults.⁷²





Family Caregiving

Maine women are engaged in a variety of caregiving work for children, parents, grandparents, grandchildren, and in some cases neighbors and friends. In addition to personal impacts, this has an impact on the Maine economy. Around 8,000 people in Maine are unable to participate in the workforce because of the care needs of their older family members and the shortage of direct care services in the state. **According to estimates from the Maine Center for Economic Policy, people leaving the workforce to provide necessary care costs Maine more than \$1 billion per year.**⁵⁰

Caring for family and community members is often seen as an act of love – and it is. It is often also an act of necessity, and it can take a toll, especially when caregivers do not have the support they need. Caregivers are more likely to experience depression and several chronic diseases when compared to the general population.⁵¹ The wellbeing of individuals receiving care is also at stake – evidence shows that factors like caregiver depression and resentment are risk factors for elder abuse.⁵²

In 2022, the Administration for Community Living (ACL) presented a National Strategy to Support Family Caregivers as required by the RAISE Act.⁵³ The strategy lays out actions for federal, state, and local governments, as well as employers and community partners.

Who are family caregivers?

Family caregivers are unpaid family members or other individuals who have a significant relationship with, and who provide a broad range of assistance to, an individual with a chronic or other health condition, disability or functional limitation. - RAISE Act to Support Family Caregivers⁵³

In 2023, AARP reported that there are **166,000 family caregivers in Maine** providing unpaid care that is valued at **\$2.9 billion**.⁵⁴ The majority of family caregivers are women.⁵⁵

The strategy focuses on laying out five key goals for supporting family caregivers across the country:

1. Achieve greater awareness of and outreach to family caregivers
2. Advance partnerships and engagement with family caregivers
3. Strengthen services and supports for family caregivers
4. Ensure financial and workplace security for family caregivers
5. Expand data, research, and evidence-based practices to support family caregivers





How has Maine supported family caregivers?

- In the **Maine State Plan on Aging for 2025-2028**,⁵⁶ caregiver supports are a core component of planned investments through the Older Americans Act. Goals include improving outcomes for older adults and their caregivers by:
 - Raising awareness about existing resources for caregivers
 - Engaging caregivers in care planning and service delivery
 - Expanding access to programs, services, and supports for family caregivers
- MaineCare and state-funded home and community-based services programs cover **respite care**⁵⁷ and Maine's Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS) provides **state-funded caregiver supports**.⁵⁸
- **Pilot program**: In 2022, OADS and the state's five Area Agencies on Aging began providing Respite for ME Grants to family caregivers of people living with Alzheimer's Disease and related dementias.⁵⁹
- OADS partnered with the Area Agencies on Aging implemented an **evidence-based assessment and care management system** known as T-Care™ to provide resources and supports for family members providing care.¹⁹
- OADS contracted with National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Maine to provide a **free caregiver training webinar series**.⁶⁰

An accompanying roadmap for the National Strategy highlights opportunities for states to better work with and support family caregivers.⁶¹ We are excited that Maine has already started down this path, but there is more to be done – particularly to improve availability of and access to respite care and adult day services across the state.⁶²



Key Recommendations

- MePCSW applauds recent state child care investments (detailed above) and recommends that Maine continue to advance the policy recommendations from the Maine Children’s Cabinet Early Childhood Advisory Council⁶³ to **continue deepening Maine’s investment in the early care and education system**. Through technical assistance, additional investment in higher salaries for early education careers, support for employers,⁶⁴ as well as strong local partnerships, we can continue to build on recent success.
- Continue enacting the goals of the National Strategy to Support Family Caregivers, as well as the goals outlined in the Maine State Plan on Aging for 2025-2028, to **ensure that family caregivers are engaged and supported in care planning and state programming**. Conduct outreach and education to ensure that family caregivers are aware of existing resources offered by the state and by other key partners like Area Agencies on Aging and AARP Maine.
- **Look for opportunities to create permanent, state-wide, fully-funded respite programs** that build on the lessons from the Respite for ME Grants.⁵⁹ Incentivize the creation of new community respite programs through existing hubs (e.g., churches, community centers), particularly in rural communities that currently lack adult day services.



V. MAINE WOMEN'S ECONOMIC SECURITY: POVERTY AND OPPORTUNITY

Economic security describes a person or community's ability to access and afford basic needs like food, clothing, health care, and shelter.⁶⁵ Ongoing economic security for an individual or family grants more than the basics — it affords dignity, it enhances safety, and it unlocks potential. On a wider scale, it improves health⁶⁶ and education outcomes while supporting a more engaged population.

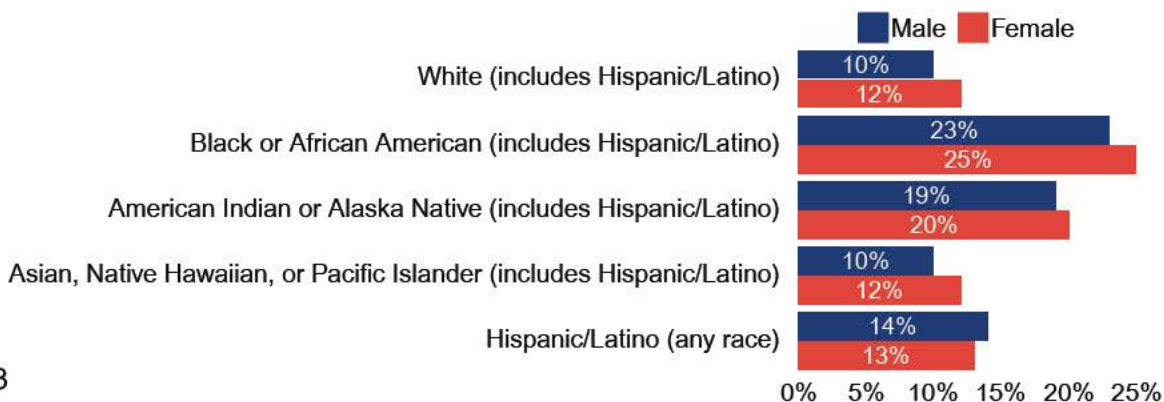
When individuals and families live with financial hardship and cannot meet their basic needs, there are very real impacts on health and wellbeing. Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention has found that new parents with lower incomes have less access to health care services and experience higher rates of postpartum depression and stress.⁶⁷ These disparities have impacts on Maine women, as well as on future generations of Maine residents.

Defining Poverty and Financial Hardship

Much of the information below explores how factors like race/ethnicity, age, geography, and gender interact with poverty rates in Maine. To represent this in the figures below, we often use the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) as a marker. However, many people in Maine have incomes above the FPL but still struggle to afford basic expenses and access economic security. The **ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) framework** does an excellent job of describing this issue and identifying the sometimes invisible financial hardship so many Mainers face. **MePCSW encourages readers to view the United for ALICE Research Center's materials.**²

Women are more likely than men to experience poverty in Maine across most racial and ethnic groups. Black or African American populations have the highest poverty rates in the state, followed closely by American Indian or Alaska Native populations. Research comparing the Wabanaki Nations to the overall Maine population as well as to other tribal nations across the country has documented starkly disparate poverty rates and income levels⁶⁸ — a reality that negatively impacts economic, social, and health-related outcomes.

Maine poverty rates by race/ethnicity and sex, 2018-2022



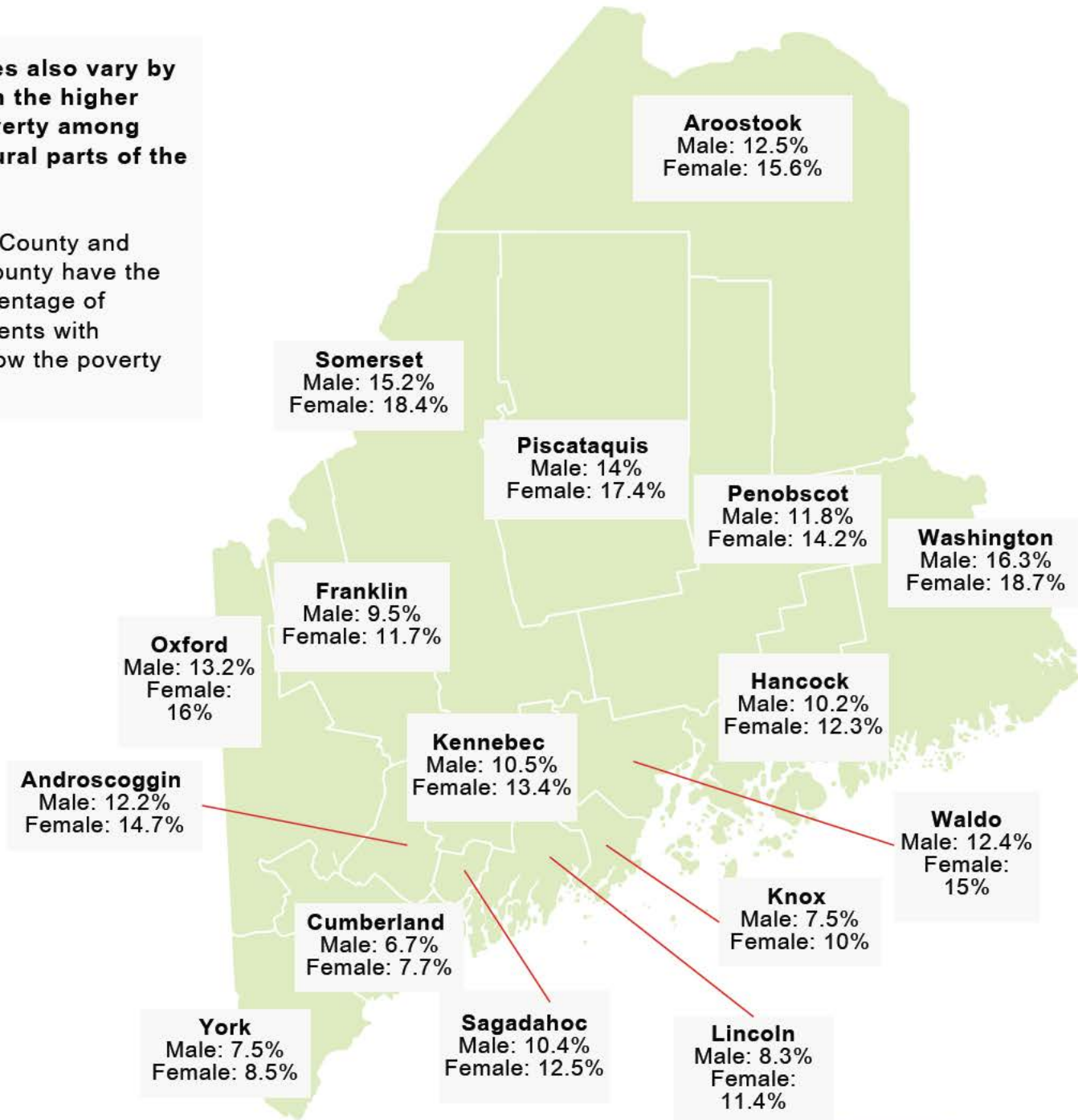
Source: Adapted from the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities resource – HDPulse. Data Source: American Community Survey 2018-2022 5-year estimates.



Maine poverty rates by county and sex, 2018-2022

Poverty rates also vary by county, with the higher rates of poverty among women in rural parts of the state.

Washington County and Somerset County have the highest percentage of female residents with incomes below the poverty line.

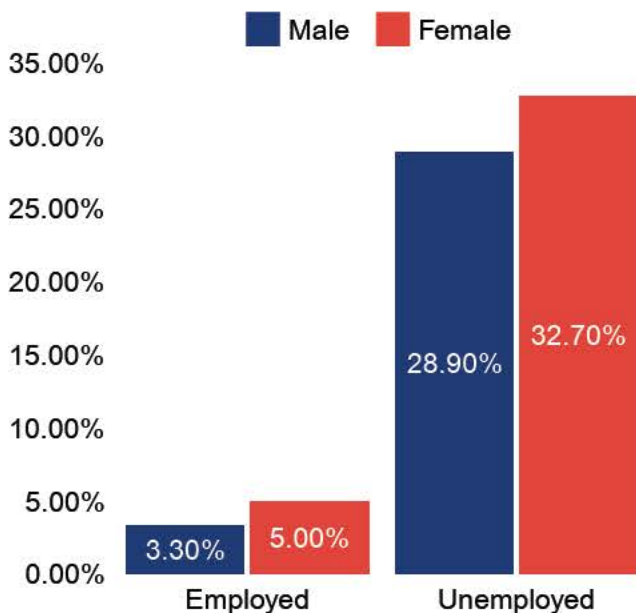




Women are more likely than men to have incomes below the Federal Poverty Level, regardless of employment status. This reality is driven by women’s higher rates of part-time work, imbalanced caregiving responsibilities, as well as lower pay in traditionally female-dominated roles – particularly the undervalued care roles discussed earlier in this report.

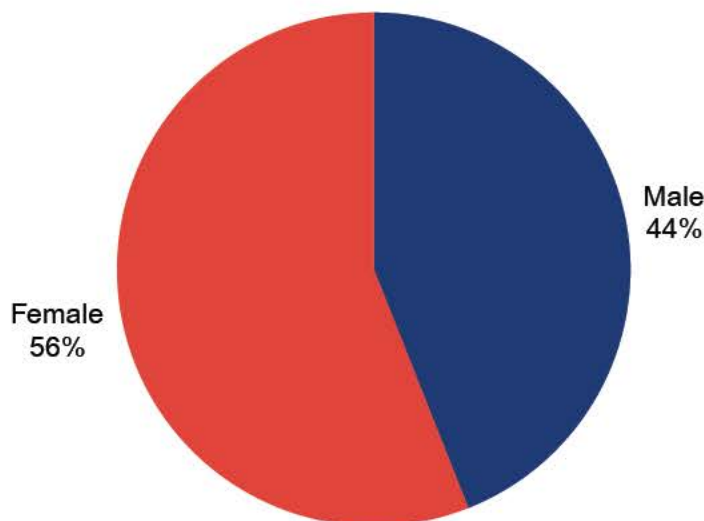
Women in Maine are more likely than men to rely on MaineCare (Maine’s Medicaid Program) for health care coverage. This mirrors national trends,⁶⁹ where women have lower incomes and are more likely than men to qualify for Medicaid (Medicaid’s eligibility categories include pregnant people, parents of children under 18, disabled people, or people over age 65).

Poverty rates among Maine’s population by sex and employment status (2023)



Source: American Community Survey 1-Year estimates (2023), Table S1701

Distribution of MaineCare enrollees by sex (2022)



Source: KFF, State Health Facts, Distribution of Nonelderly Adults with Medicaid by Sex, estimates based on the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey 2022 1-year estimates





Earnings and the Gender Wage Gap

The gender wage gap remains present and impactful in Maine, with full-time women workers making about 83% of what men make.

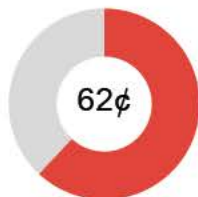
Maine's gender wage gap		
Median annual earnings for women	Median annual earnings for men	Median annual gap in earnings
\$48,496	\$58,619	\$10,123

Source: 2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-year estimates (Table S2001).
 Note: earnings are for full time, year-round workers.

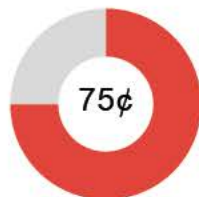
This disparity is a driver of economic insecurity, and it is a burden that is not evenly distributed. Various aspects of identity widen the gender wage gap for mothers, BIPOC women, disabled women, LGBTQ+ women, and transgender and non-binary Mainers.

The gender wage gap by race/ethnicity in Maine

What women make for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men - All earners, including part time, part year work



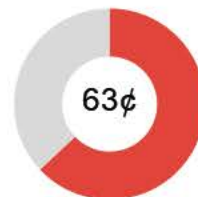
Hispanic/Latina women



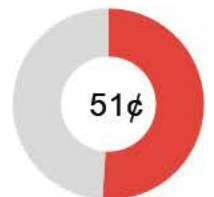
White, non-Hispanic women



Asian women

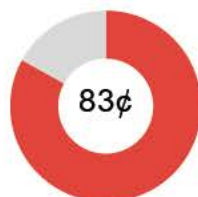
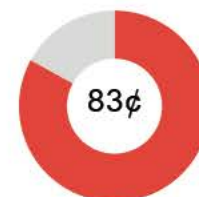
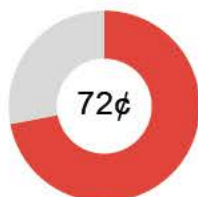


American Indian/Alaska Native women



Black/African American women

What women make for every dollar paid to white, non-Hispanic men - Full time, year round earners



**Insufficient data to calculate the wage gap*

Source: Figures for women by race/ethnicity by state calculated by the National Women's Law Center are based on 2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-year estimates





The LGBTQ+ wage gap (2021 national data)

Among full time, year round workers:

What people in the specified population group are paid for every dollar paid to the median U.S. worker



LGBTQ+ women

Non-binary workers

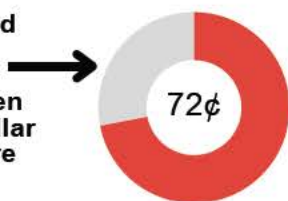
Transgender men

Transgender women

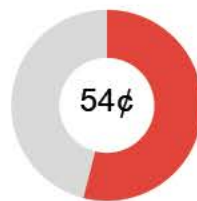
Source: Human Rights Campaign, which used the 2021 Annual Community LGBTQ Survey

The gender wage gap for disabled women in Maine

Full-time, year-round earners:
What disabled women are paid for every dollar nondisabled men are paid



Including part-time and part-year workers:
What disabled women are paid for every dollar nondisabled men are paid



Adapted from: the National Women's Law Center "The Wage Gap by State for Disabled Women Overall — Sept 2024"
Source: State wage gaps calculated based on U.S. Census Bureau 2018-2022 American Community Survey using IPUMS. Figures are median annual earnings for full-time, year-round workers. Disabled women are those who self-identify as having a difficulty with self care, vision, hearing, independent living, mobility, and/or cognitive functions.

Among Maine parents, mothers earn far less than fathers, with a median annual earnings gap of \$19,791. Additionally, national data shows men tend to earn more after becoming parents, whereas women earn less after becoming parents.⁷⁰

Median annual earnings for mothers and fathers in Maine			
Mothers	Fathers	Annual earnings gap	Earnings ratio
\$41,000	\$60,791	\$19,791	67.40%

Source: Adapted from IWPR analysis of 2018-2022 American Community Survey 5-year estimates IPUMS microdata
Notes: Mothers and fathers are 16 years and older and defined as having at least one child under the age of 18. All workers with earnings, including part time and part year work





In Maine, households led by single women face a high level of financial hardship, with 35% of single female-headed households living below the Federal Poverty Level. Single female-led households make up 22% of Maine households with children, while single male-led households make up 10% of Maine households with children. Researchers at United for Alice offer insights on the level of financial hardship faced by single female-headed households (see earlier text box for additional detail about the ALICE threshold).²

Percent of Maine households with children that were below the ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) threshold in 2021		
Two-parent households	Single female-headed households	Single male-headed households
15%	75%	54%

Sources: ALICE Threshold, 2021, adapted from "2023 ALICE in Maine: A Study of Financial Hardship". Definitions are drawn from U.S. Census Bureau data, using the following definition of single-parent households: "Single," when used in the context of "single-parent family/household," means only one parent is present in the home. The parent may be never-married, widowed, divorced, or married, spouse absent.

In 2022, the Catherine Cutler Institute produced a report on the **Economic Security of Older Women in Maine**.⁷¹ The report, which informed ongoing initiatives at the Maine Women's Lobby Education Fund and the Maine Council on Aging, illustrated many of the long-term impacts that the wage gap and the demands of caregiving have on the economic security of older Maine women. The report tells a distressing story about the economic challenges faced by older women across the state. MePCSW drew significant inspiration and rich information from this work, and we encourage readers to view the report.

The gender wage gap creates financial disparities that have impacts across the lifespan, with part-time, low-wage work leading to low retirement incomes and higher poverty rates for older Maine women. While poverty rates decrease for older men in Maine, for older women poverty rates increase as compared to working years. **Maine women over 75 live in poverty at twice the rate of men.**⁷²

Older Maine women are more likely than men to be living in poverty, more likely to live alone, more likely to rent their homes, and more likely to need long-term services and supports but be unable to afford them.⁷¹ After decades of working lower paying jobs that make it challenging to save for retirement or doing part-time work so they can wear the many hats of parenting and caregiving, older Maine women shoulder a heavy burden. Recent wins, like the expanded eligibility for the Medicare Savings Program, are a step in the right direction — but there is more to do for older women in Maine.



Key Recommendations

- **Continue to explore⁷³ and pilot guaranteed income programs,⁷⁴** including in rural parts of Maine, which have been found to increase financial wellbeing, improve both mental and physical health, and advance racial and gender equity. Identify opportunities to provide complementary wrap-around services alongside guaranteed income programs.
 - **Example:** Quality Housing Coalition piloted a basic income program called Project HOME Trust, which provided 20 low-income single mothers with \$1,000 per month for one year. Findings included an increase in the number of hours per week that participants worked and a stronger sense of financial security.⁷⁵ Targeted approaches like this could help advance opportunities for Maine women.
- **Use data tools,** like the Invest in Tomorrow Dashboard,⁷⁶ Urban Institute Upward Mobility Data Dashboard,⁷⁷ and the Elder Index,⁷⁸ to understand conditions at the community level and target resources and interventions where they are most needed.
- **Continue to pursue higher wages for care professions in education and healthcare** where women are employed in large numbers, while also making more lucrative and traditionally male-dominated career pathways more accessible to women and other nontraditional workers.
- **Conduct outreach and education** to ensure that older women in Maine are aware of the expanded eligibility for the Medicare Savings Program.



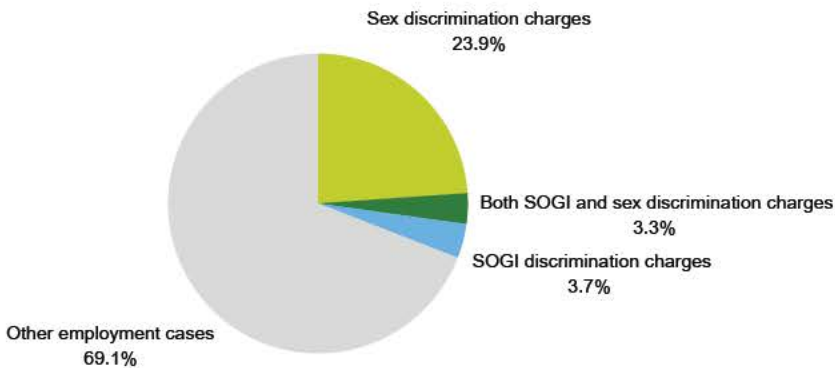
VI. GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION, VIOLENCE, AND HARASSMENT IN THE WORLD OF WORK

Gender-Based Discrimination in the Workplace

Across the country, women experience higher rates of gender-based workplace discrimination than men.⁷⁹ This includes wage discrimination. In 2022, Maine clinical psychologist Clare Mundell won a discrimination case in which she was being paid half as much as her male colleagues.⁸⁰

The Maine Human Rights Commission (MHRC) receives and investigates complaints of unlawful discrimination, including in the area of employment. **Almost one in three (30.9%) of the employment cases filed with the MHRC are related to sex discrimination, sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) discrimination, or both.**

Workplace discrimination charges in Maine



Source: Maine Human Rights Commission data for charges filed between January 1, 2021 - August 1, 2024. Includes both ongoing and closed cases related to employment discrimination. SOGI = sexual orientation/gender identity

Women in Maine may experience **intersectional discrimination**, which occurs when an individual is impacted by multiple forms of discrimination at the same time.⁸¹ Sex discrimination charges and SOGI discrimination charges filed with the MHRC are often accompanied by charges of other types of discrimination (see below). **For example, 15% of sex discrimination cases also included age discrimination charges and 35% of SOGI discrimination cases also included disability discrimination charges.**

Workplace sex discrimination - Intersections with other forms of discrimination



Percent of workplace sex discrimination cases that included other types of discrimination charges

Source: Maine Human Rights Commission data for charges filed between January 1, 2021 - August 1, 2024. Includes both ongoing and closed cases related to employment discrimination.

Workplace SOGI discrimination - Intersections with other forms of discrimination

Percent of workplace SOGI discrimination cases that included other types of discrimination charges





Discrimination is an underreported issue, and cases filed with the state do not paint a comprehensive picture of workplace discrimination in Maine. Worker-led solutions, like the one in the text box below, can offer another opportunity to gather information about workplace discrimination.

The **Southern Maine Workers Center (SMWC)** has previously run a hotline to support workers, with a particular focus on low-income and working-class people. SMWC gathered data about the workers who called into the hotline between 2017 and 2022. The organization found women were more likely to call the hotline for support (56.1% of callers who provided information about their gender were women, 41% were men, and 2.9% were transgender or nonbinary). From 2017-2022, workers called the hotline from all over the state with questions about unemployment, job loss/firing, workplace injuries, unsafe or illegal working conditions and more. **Workplace discrimination was among the top concerns raised on the hotline**, with disability discrimination as the most common type disclosed followed by gender/sex/sexual orientation discrimination. Notably, many callers reported intersectional impacts of discrimination on the basis of several aspects of their identity (such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and disability status) - mirroring the findings from the Maine Human Rights Commission data.

Gender-Based Violence and Harassment in the World of Work

The **U.S. Department of Labor Women’s Bureau** addresses **gender-based violence and harassment as a workplace safety and health issue**. These issues have negative impacts on the physical and mental health of workers and can make it more challenging for employers to recruit and retain workers. **The U.S. National Plan to End Gender-Based Violence says that nationally, anywhere from 25% to 85% of women report having experienced sexual harassment in the workplace — though this issue often goes unreported.**⁹² The National Plan also highlights specific sectors and types of work that are associated with higher rates of gender-based violence and harassment. These include male-dominated fields like trucking and construction, low-wage jobs in fields like agriculture, jobs that rely on tipped employment, and jobs that happen in isolated or vulnerable settings such as home health care roles.





A variety of factors can put workers at risk of gender-based violence and harassment.⁸³ These risk factors include:

- Workplaces/industries that have historically lacked diversity, particularly when this has led to harmful behavior norms
- Cultural and language differences that lead to segregation based on nationality or make employees less aware of their rights or workplace norms
- Workplaces with significant power disparities, which may fall along gender lines
- Workplaces that rely on customer service and ensuring customer satisfaction

The Women’s Bureau also identifies the impacts of domestic violence, sexual assault, and stalking on working women.⁸⁴ Though these may take place outside the workplace context, each “can also have spillover effects into the world of work, impacting general workplace safety and affecting a survivor’s work performance, attendance, or ability to find or maintain employment.” In 2023, 82% of the people served by Maine’s Domestic Violence Resource Centers identified themselves as female – highlighting the disproportionate impact of domestic violence on women in Maine.⁸⁵

A 2004 pilot study from Maine Department of Labor⁸⁶ continues to be cited in more recent work⁸⁷ about the impacts of domestic violence on occupational health and safety. The study found that 74% of intimate partner abusers had access to their partner’s workplace, 21% of offenders reported they contacted their partner at their workplace in violation of a no-contact order, and 78% of surveyed perpetrators used workplace resources at least once to express remorse or anger, check up on, pressure or threaten their partner. Despite this, not all employers have policies in place to address these situations when they arise.

A 2019 study conducted by the Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence (MCEDV) also highlights the impact a partner’s abusive tactics have on the employment of their victim – making it so that they are less likely to be stably employed, less likely to advance in their employment, and less likely to reach financial stability. When asked about how the actions of abusive partners affected survivors’ ability to earn income outside of the house, **62% of survivors reported that their abusive partners made it difficult for them to continue working at their current place of employment** through tactics such as causing physical injuries, turning off alarm clocks, making co-workers feel unsafe, hiding car keys, or refusing to watch children.⁸⁸



Key Recommendations

- **Connect with Maine thought-leaders**, like Maine Coalition to End Domestic Violence and Maine Coalition Against Sexual Assault, for policy expertise and insights into real-time issues, challenges, and solutions.
- **Ensure that state agencies like the Maine Human Rights Commission and the Maine Department of Labor have the resources needed** to investigate instances of discrimination and enforce existing state laws and requirements. Continue to enhance coordination across state data systems to offer an updated understanding of the impacts of gender-based violence, including domestic violence, in Maine workplaces.
- **Work with employers to develop policies that support workers who are survivors** of gender-based violence, sexual violence, and domestic violence, providing necessary flexibility. Such policies should include:
 - Accepting the confidential address of an employee enrolled in Maine’s Address Confidentiality Program
 - Ensuring personal information of any employee, such as address, contact information, and work schedule, is not inadvertently disclosed to current or former partners.
- **Identify and support programming that provides community-specific support** for BIPOC and immigrant women who are survivors of gender-based violence.
- **Ensure that state policies and rulemaking processes consider and prioritize the specific needs of survivors** to ensure that social supports include these populations, and work with employers to deepen understanding about existing and future programs – including safe leave.



VII. RECENT MEPCSW ACTIVITY



In 2023, MePCSW received funding and authorization to hire an Executive Director.

In March 2024, Elinor Higgins was brought on as the Commission's first staff person since 1991. We are deeply grateful to the Maine Legislature and to Gov. Mills for supporting this new position, which has dramatically increased the Commission's capacity to investigate, analyze, and support activities that will benefit women and girls across the state.

Women in construction and the trades

To help carry out Gov. Mills' Executive Order on Women in Construction, MePCSW partnered with Maine Department of Labor (MDOL) to hold focus groups and interviews with women across the state who are employed in the construction, engineering, and the trades – as well as girls with interest in STEM and trades careers. In continued partnership with MDOL, MePCSW is working to address gender-based violence and harassment in the construction industry, with a focus on key partnerships, employer outreach, education, and training. MePCSW is also working with partners to promote existing child care supports to construction employers while exploring creative solutions to the unique child care challenges in the construction industry.

State Data Governance Workgroup

Along with other agency heads and subject matter experts at the Department of the Secretary of State, the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations, and the Department of Administrative and Financial Services, MePCSW staff have joined the State Data Governance Workgroup⁸⁹ and contributed key expertise – in particular on data definitions for demographic categories like sex at birth, gender, and sexual orientation. This work aligns with data interoperability goals identified in the 2022 MePCSW report, "Count Us In: Maine Women, Data, and the Care Economy."

Child care

In 2023, MePCSW produced a white paper, "Maine Needs Quality, Affordable Child Care,"⁹² which aimed to amplify research and advocacy on this issue, celebrate recent investments in child care infrastructure, and express the critical nature of child care for Maine women and their families, as well as to Maine's business and industry community. MePCSW also hosted a webinar entitled, "Spotlight on Women in Leadership, STEM, and the Importance of Child Care." The rich conversation featured speakers from Fiddlehead School of Arts and Sciences, the NEW Leadership program at the University of Maine, and the Association for the Education of Young Children of Maine.

Gender parity on corporate boards

Pursuant to Title 13-C, Chapter 8, Subchapter 1, §803, MePCSW staff prepared a report⁹¹ on behalf of the Department of the Secretary of State about gender parity among the boards of directors at publicly held corporations in Maine.



Gender and the community health workforce

In August 2024, MePCSW staff spoke at the 2nd Annual Community Health Worker Awareness Day at the State House, an event hosted by the Maine Community Health Worker Initiative.⁹⁰ Staff underscored the dual opportunity of improving health outcomes for Maine residents with community health worker services while also supporting better economic outcomes for a female-dominated care workforce. MePCSW staff have also worked with the Maine Doula Coalition and other key partners to advise on a strategy for improving access to doula services in Maine. Doulas are a key perinatal workforce that supports better outcomes for parents and babies.

MePCSW's 2022 report

The report flagged the difficulty in obtaining data on the needs of women across the age spectrum, but especially those living in rural areas and for women of color, women with disabilities, and older women. Good data supports sound public policy, so this is a critical issue.

MePCSW's 2020 report

The report⁸⁸ focused on four key areas affecting Maine women: economic security, domestic violence, education, and health. The report flagged key issues and provided recommendations for action.

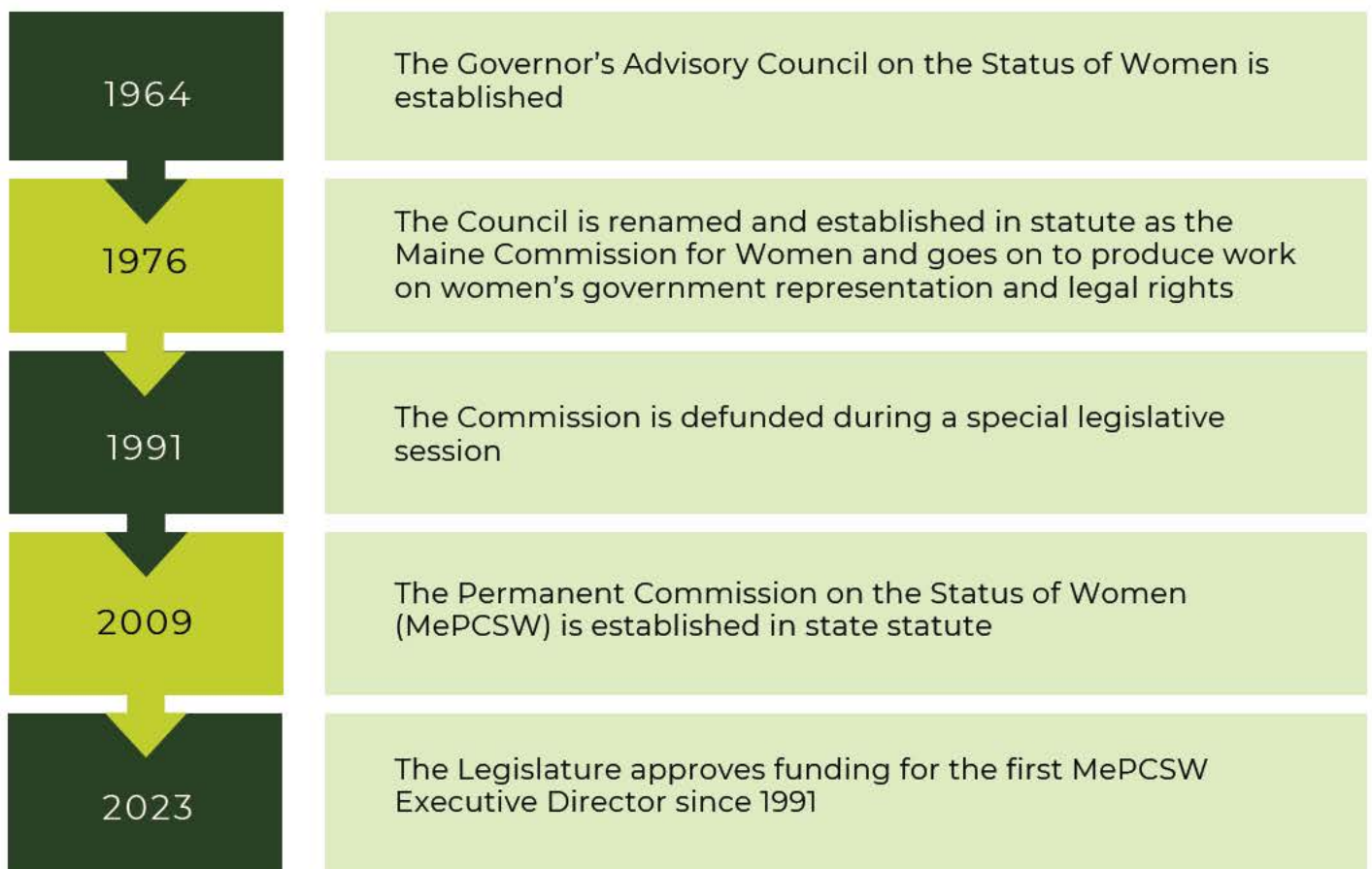


VIII. APPENDIX A

Commission History

The Maine Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (MePCSW) has its roots in an advisory body appointed by Gov. John Reed in 1964, entitled The Governor's Advisory Council on the Status of Women. According to a 1977 report,⁹⁷ it was the first council or commission on women in the Northeast. In 1976, state statute renamed the advisory body and established it as the Maine Commission for Women. In the years that followed, the Commission produced handbooks about the working women in Maine and the legal rights of Maine women. The Commission maintained a "Talent Bank" designed to recruit qualified women to serve on State Boards and Commissions, held workshops for women interested in running for office, and provided testimony to the legislature on behalf of Maine women and girls until it was defunded and dissolved in 1991.

The MePCSW was re-established in 2009 and has continued building on this rich history. MePCSW produced its first report of the 21st century in 2012, and in subsequent years has highlighted many of the key issues impacting the wellbeing of women and girls in Maine. See the timeline below for a brief overview of MePCSW history.



APPENDIX B

Notes on Language and Definitions

Sex and Gender: As described in the introduction section, much of the data we use in this report to describe sex and gender is limited to a binary, usually “male” and “female” or in some cases “men” and “women.” MePCSW believes in the importance of improving data systems to better reflect the diverse gender identities of Maine residents and we are working on this issue through the State Data Governance Workgroup, described above. **Our working definitions for sex and gender are below, adapted from a report by the Committee on National Statistics⁹⁴ at the National Academies of Science, Engineering and Medicine.**

- **Sex** is typically assigned at birth by medical professionals as either male or female. Sex is a multidimensional construct based on a cluster of anatomical and physiological traits that include external genitalia, secondary sex characteristics, gonads, chromosomes, and hormones.
- **Gender** is a multidimensional construct that links gender identity, which is a core element of a person’s individual identity; gender expression, which is how a person signals their gender to others through their behavior and appearance (such as hair style and clothing); and cultural expectations about social status, characteristics, and behavior that are associated with sex traits.

Race and Ethnicity: Much of the data in this report is drawn from publicly available sources like the U.S. Census Bureau. The U.S. Census Bureau adheres to Office of Management and Budget (OMB) standards on race and ethnicity, and uses the following definitions:

- **White** – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.
- **Black or African American** – A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa.
- **American Indian or Alaska Native** – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America) and who maintains tribal affiliation or community attachment.
- **Asian** – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- **Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander** – A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.

The information collected by the U.S. Census Bureau is self-reported, and people who identify with more than one race may choose to provide multiple answers to questions about race.⁹⁵ In 2024, OMB released updated standards for race/ethnicity data collection that will impact future data collection.⁹⁶



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