

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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Maine's Permanent Commission
on the Status of Women

The Commission & the Status of Women in Maine

2017 Report

Maine's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (MePCSW) is an unfunded, nonpartisan, independent advisory board charged by statute with advising Maine policymakers—including the legislature and Governor—on matters that impact our state's women and girls. Commission members represent a variety of fields, backgrounds and political persuasions. The Commission researches and prepares a biennial report for the legislature that reflects the current status of women and girls in Maine and recommends policy options that will improve their lives.

In the 2015 report, MePCSW identified and provided an in-depth overview of key areas that impact the well-being of Maine women and girls, including Economic Security, Health, Freedom from Violence, and Education. In this 2017 report to the legislature, presented as a series of one page briefs, we update, explore and provide policy recommendations that we believe will make the greatest difference for girls and women in these four areas.

As with any wide-ranging report, our discussion is broad. However, it is

We need to be attuned to these varying experiences and the effects they have in the lives of Maine women and girls, and as a State endeavor to reflect these realities in our policies.

important to note that the experiences among Maine women and girls vary greatly, based on factors such as economic status, race and ethnicity, primary language, sexual orientation, gender identity, and many other intersecting factors. While we speak in broad strokes in this report, we note the importance of remembering those in the margins as we craft policy recommendations. As we seek solutions to the issues facing our state, we need to be attuned to these varying experiences and the effects they have in the lives of Maine women and girls, and as a State endeavor to reflect these realities in our policies.



Working to improve opportunities for women and girls in Maine

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Maine Women & Economic Security

Economic security – made possible by factors such as gender pay parity, living wages, employment-based benefits (e.g., insurance, retirement), public assistance, paid family leave, sick leave and taxes/tax credits – is a leading factor in the long term well-being of girls and women.

Economic security means having access to resources sufficient to meet one's basic needs for clothing, housing, food, and health care. A significant number of Maine women struggle to maintain their economic security, while still others have yet to experience it at all.

Where we are

- Maine women comprise nearly half of the labor force,¹ yet earn an average of \$.79 on the dollar compared to their male counterparts.² Women of Color face even greater wage inequality.³
- Maine women account for more than half of the state's part-time workers,⁴ with lower wages and fewer or no employment-based benefits such as health insurance, paid sick time, retirement, and disability. They also provide caregiving to older adults and children more often than men, ultimately decreasing potential hours of paid work and retirement contributions.
- More than one third of Maine's homeless population are women.⁵
- Over half of low-income women defer medical treatment because they cannot afford it.⁶

Economic security is a leading factor in the long term well-being of Maine girls and women.

What Maine can do

- Implement policies that address the gender wage gap.
- Increase access and affordability of health insurance by accepting federal funds to provide health coverage to uninsured & underinsured Mainers.
- Increase availability of safe, affordable and accessible housing available for all Maine people.
- Activate the \$15 million senior housing bond, authorized by voters in 2015.
- Reform the tax code to allow family members to make tax-deductible contributions to a caregiver's qualified retirement plan.
- Ensure that our public safety net—programs such as ASPIRE, TANF and General Assistance—is adequately structured and funded to meet the needs of the economically insecure.



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Maine Women & Economic Security

Footnotes

1 U.S. Census Bureau. (2015). American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. Accessed Nov. 16, 2016.

2 Joint Economic Committee, United States Congress. (2016). "Gender Pay Inequality: Consequences for Women, Families and the Economy." Accessed Nov. 16, 2016.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Maine Housing. (2014.) Point in Time Survey. Accessed Nov. 16, 2016.

6 Garrett D. and Glover, S. (2014). Mind the gap: Women in need of health insurance. National Women's Law Center.



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Maine Women & Freedom from Violence

Gender-based violence – including the full range of domestic and sexual violence victimizations, stalking, and human trafficking – has a profound impact on Maine women and girls of all ages. Domestic and sexual violence disproportionately affect women and girls. As in the rest of the nation, these crimes carry significant stigma for victims, and are the most underreported violent crimes.¹

Violence profoundly effects all aspects of survivors' lives, from their educational attainment to their economic security to their health. Below are some current challenges and possible solutions for violence faced by Maine's women and girls.

Where we are

- In Maine domestic violence assault is reported every 1 hour and 47 minutes.² About half of all assaults are reported to law enforcement.³
- One in five Mainers will experience sexual assault at some point in their lifetime. Each year, 14,000 Mainers will experience sexual violence.⁴
- At the intersection of domestic and sexual violence is sex trafficking. There are an estimated 200-300 sex trafficking victims per year in Maine.⁵
- New efforts around offender accountability have emerged since our last report, including pilot projects for electronic monitoring in domestic violence cases, and an in-depth study of the effectiveness of Batterer Intervention Programs in Maine.

Domestic and sexual violence disproportionately affect women and girls. As in the rest of the nation, these crimes carry significant stigma for Maine victims, and are the most underreported violent crimes.

- New Mainer women and girls, especially refugee women and girls, are likely to have had traumatic and violent experiences before coming to the United States. A number of factors, including language and cultural barriers and economic instability, leave them vulnerable to re-traumatization and re-victimization.
- Tribal communities experience elevated rates of sexual and domestic violence, primarily perpetrated by non-Native men against Native women.⁶ While the Violence Against Women Act of 2013 sought to give tribes the ability to hold non-Native offenders who commit crimes on sovereign tribal lands accountable, further legislative action is needed for those changes apply in Maine. While legislation was introduced in the 127th Legislature, it failed to make it into law.
- Violence is a leading driver of homelessness for women and their families. During the 127th Maine Legislature, policy makers voted to amend the laws governing residential leases to provide greater protection for tenants who are victims of domestic violence, sexual assault (including sex trafficking) or stalking.



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Maine Women & Freedom from Violence

Where we are, continued

- In the 126th and 127th Legislatures, policy makers took action to make nonconsensual distribution of sexually explicit images illegal. Victims now also have the ability to seek a protection from abuse order when someone threatens to share their private images.

What Maine can do

- Continue to pursue policies that reduce serious risk for victims and hold offenders accountable.
- Continue to pursue policies that will help victims of domestic and sexual violence, human trafficking, and stalking gain and maintain safe, affordable housing, including extending the protections provided through the federal Violence Against Women Act to private rental housing, and funding immediate and transitional housing for individuals experiencing substance abuse and complex trauma, such as human trafficking victims.
- Amend our laws to make it possible for Wabanaki Tribes to hold accountable non-Native offenders of domestic and sexual violence who commit crimes on their lands.
- Ensure that Maine's public safety net programs, which play such an important role for victims of violence, are funded. This includes ensuring ongoing General Assistance support for New Mainers who are significantly more likely than not to have experienced rape and relationship violence.

The Commission applauds lawmakers for finding ways to work together to increase safety for victims of violence and accountability for offenders. For more in-depth analysis of the health issues related to Maine women and girls, [please refer to the Commission's 2015 Report](#).

Footnotes

- 1 Truman & Morgan. (2016). Crime victimization 2015. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved from <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv15.pdf>
- 2 Maine Dept. of Public Safety "Crime in Maine 2015," https://www1.maine.gov/dps/cim/crime_in_maine/2015pdf/030%20Violent.pdf
- 3 Truman, J. L. & Morgan, R. E. (2014). Nonfatal domestic violence, 2003-2012. Retrieved from <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/ndv0312.pdf>
- 4 Dumont, R & Shaler, G. (2015). Maine Crime Victimization Report: Informing public policy for safer communities. Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine
- 5 Hornby, et al. (2015). Maine Human Trafficking Needs Assessment. Retrieved from http://www.mainesten.org/uploads/4/4/3/6/44365787/hza_me_htna_final_for_print_01062015.pdf
- 6 Black, M.C., et al. (2011). The National Intimate Partner and Sexual Violence Survey (NISVS): 2010 Summary Report. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.



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Maine Women & Health

Good health is key to a good, productive life. Many factors, including our life experiences and our access to health care, determine how healthy we are. We have a vested interest in helping ensure that Maine women and girls stay as healthy as possible.

Maine women and girls struggle to access a full portfolio of health services—including crucial dental care, behavioral health, and substance abuse treatment—made inaccessible by lack of meaningful coverage and availability of providers. Below we outline challenges and possibilities to increase the health of Maine's women and girls.

Where we are

- 13,000 Maine women fall into the insurance gap. Over 50% of low-income Maine women didn't see a doctor when they needed to because they couldn't afford it.¹ In the 126th and 127th Legislatures, Maine again declined to accept federal funds that would help cover the individuals in this gap. Even among Mainers with coverage, high deductibles and other restrictions often make accessing needed health care prohibitive.
- Women make up approximately 56% of Mainers aged 65 or older² and face significant health challenges. Because women live longer than men, their need for affordable access to healthcare spans greater periods of time.
- Significantly more middle and high school girls have seriously considered dying by suicide than their male counterparts.³

Maine women and girls struggle to access a full portfolio of health services—including crucial dental care, behavioral health, and substance abuse treatment—made inaccessible by lack of meaningful coverage and availability of providers.

- Teen birth rates in Maine are among the lowest in the country.⁴ Data suggests that the overall falling rates of teen births across the nation are due to improved contraceptive use among teens.⁵
- Maine women often cannot afford abortion care even though access to the procedure has increased.
- In 2015, the Legislature increased access to MaineCare for reproductive health services, which helps women access critical health care and will save Maine significant dollars.

What Maine can do

- Increase access and affordability of health insurance by accepting federal funds to provide health coverage to uninsured & underinsured Maine women and girls who are unable to obtain insurance currently through either MaineCare or the Exchange.



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Maine Women & Health

What we can do, continued

- Ensure that people who rely on MaineCare for their health insurance also have access to dental coverage, not currently covered under MaineCare.
- Ensure that no person in need of medical attention, including the full range of reproductive, dental and behavioral health services, is unable to attain it due to cost or resulting debt, or lack of geographic access.
- Provide coverage for all reproductive health services, including abortion, through MaineCare.

For more in-depth analysis of the health issues related to Maine women and girls, [please refer to the Commission's 2015 Report](#).

Footnotes

- 1 National Women's Law Center. (2014). Mind the gap: Low-income women in dire need of health insurance. Retrieved from http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/nwlcmindthegapmedicaidreportfinal_20140122.pdf
- 2 American Community Survey. United States Census Bureau, 2010. Retrieved from: <http://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=CF>
- 3 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey. (2015). Retrieved from https://data.mainepublichealth.gov/miyhs/2015_report_fact_sheets
- 4 US Census. (2015). American community survey. Information retrieved from: <http://www.pressherald.com/2015/12/05/teen-birth-rate-plummets-in-maine-u-s-census-says/>
- 5 Lindberg, et al. (2016). Understanding the decline in adolescent fertility in the United States, 2007-2012. Journal of Adolescent Health, 59, 577-583.



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Maine Women & Education

Gender equity in the provision of educational opportunities for girls and women is an effective way of decreasing poverty, improving the health and well-being of individuals and families. Education is linked to improved health knowledge and behaviors; employment opportunities and income; and enhanced social and psychological factors.

The gendered picture of education in Maine is complex. The state boasts relatively strong trends in the educational attainment of girls. On average, across the state females consistently seek education, stay in school, and graduate at post-high school levels at greater rates than males. However, as we note below, there remain several challenges and potential solutions to issues related to gender and education in Maine.

Where we are

- The majority of a child's core brain development occurs in their first 3 years;¹ however, in Maine the majority of children lack access to affordable early childhood programs.²
- Only 29% of Maine's income-eligible children were enrolled in Head Start³ and 36% of 4-year-olds were enrolled in public preschool,⁴ suggesting that children who most need early developmental opportunities are not accessing them.
- The majority of women in Maine seeking education pursue female-dominated, lower paying occupations (e.g., child care, certified nursing assistant, teacher), which keeps their income relatively low, compared to their male counterparts.⁵

Gender equity in the provision of educational opportunities for girls and women is an effective way of decreasing poverty, improving the health and well-being of individuals and families.

- Fewer than 25% of women in Maine hold employment in higher paying science, technology, engineering or math (STEM) fields.⁶
- Maine women who work in STEM fields make 33% more, on average, than women in non-STEM jobs.⁷

What Maine can do

- Invest in quality early childhood education programs (Head Start, public preschool) to promote healthy early child development and better educational and economic outcomes for Maine girls and their families.
- Support K-12 programs that foster and develop girls' STEM engagement.
- Facilitate economic investment in female-dominated occupations (e.g, child care, teaching) to offset the difference between the cost of educational attainment and wages earned.



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Maine Women & Education

Footnotes

- 1 National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. 2000, From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press
- 2 Maine Children's Alliance. "Maine Kids Count." 2015. Retrieved from: <http://www.mekids.org/assets/files/databooks/2015/2015KIDSCOUNT-small.compressed.pdf>
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Annual Report on Degrees Conferred (2009-2010). University of Maine System, 2010. Retrieved from: <http://www.maine.edu/pdf/ANNUALREPORTONDEGREESCONFERRED.pdf>
- 6 Beede, David, Tiffany Julian, et al. "Women in STEM: A Gender Gap to Innovation Executive Summary." Retrieved from: <http://www.esa.doc.gov/sites/default/files/womeninstemagaptoinnovation8311.pdf>
- 7 Ibid.



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