

January 10, 2022



Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee,

On behalf of Maine's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW), we are writing in support of LD 344, which proposes an Amendment to the Constitution of Maine to explicitly prohibit discrimination based on an individual's sex.

Maine's PCSW 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.

As we stated in our [2020 report](#), we can point with pride to many significant gains for women achieved over Maine's history. We know that when women are empowered, enabled, and have the freedoms and rights to achieve our full potential, then all Maine people benefit. Unfortunately, our research demonstrates that Maine women still disproportionately struggle for economic security, experience domestic and sexual violence, and lack access to health care. And women of color trail white women in many categories, from pay equity to achieving high level jobs, appointments, or elected office.

PCSW members are united in believing that, in 2022, it is finally time for women to be recognized as equal under Maine's foundational document- our Constitution. The Maine Equal Rights Amendment will prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex. It will help protect women from discrimination in the workplace, especially around equal pay, as well as in critical areas such as domestic violence and access to health care. This bill is an important step forward to protect all self-identified women. The Commission further recommends that, in the working session, the Committee revises the bill to use more inclusive language focusing on gender identity and expression, rather than just sex.

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted everyone's lives, but it has imposed a particular burden on women. Women have disproportionately left the workplace to care for school-age children, resulting in financial hardship, and jeopardizing their career advancement and future earning power. Those women remaining in the workforce are disproportionately represented in frontline occupations such as nursing, teaching, child and eldercare, and in the retail and hospitality sectors. Without women, we could not have coped with the pandemic as well as we have, and our economy- our society- would be at a standstill. Now, more than ever, women deserve equal protection under Maine's Constitution.



Please join us in standing with Maine women by voting to support LD 344.

Respectfully,

Maine's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women

Fatuma Hussein, Auburn
Jill Randall, Augusta
Kim Moody, Poland
Samantha Lott Hale, Orono
Rebecca Ausin, Auburn
Maulian Dana, Indian Island
Kate Elmes, Vinalhaven
Jill Barley Roy, South Portland
Moriah Geer, Old Town
Jennifer Wilkey, Augusta
Darylen Cote, Caribou
Hon. Meredith Strang Burgess, Cumberland Foreside
Susan Mackey Andrews, Dover-Foxcroft
Ruth Kermish-Allen, Appleton
Bonnie Porta, Cape Elizabeth
Anne Gass, Gray