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2015 Report on the Status of Women & Girls in Maine



Maine's Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
2nd Biennial Report
March 2015

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This is the second biennial report of the Commission, which was established in 2010. We look forward to future editions of this report and welcome comments and questions as we seek to improve and expand upon this work.

2014-2015 Commission Members: Andrea Irwin (Acting Chair), Jen Burke (Vice Chair), Samantha Lott Hale, Sarah Ruef-Lindquist, Elizabeth Ward Saxl, Fatuma Hussein, Holly Stover, Regina Rooney, Marianne Moore, Amy Gallant, Rebekah Smith, Jessica Maurer, Melissa Simones, Jessica LaLiberte, and Sharon Campbell.

For more information about the Commission and our work, please visit:
www.maine.gov/sos/womens-comm.htm

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women is pleased to present this second biennial report on the status of women and girls in Maine. The Commission is an independent, non-partisan group established by the Maine Legislature as an independent advisory board charged with improving opportunities for women and girls in the State. It is our hope that this report generates a conversation among policy makers and the general public about the opportunities and challenges that exist for women and girls in Maine.

The 2015 Report focuses on five dimensions that contribute to the quality of life and opportunity for women and girls:

- Education
- Economic Security
- Health
- Safety and Wellbeing
- Leadership and Public Life

The report provides a comprehensive review of the available data around these dimensions and integrates the voices of Maine women and girls who have offered their experiences via our grassroots survey, which was completed by more than 3,000 individuals in the summer of 2014. This combination of quantitative and qualitative data provides the basis for the policy recommendations we offer below. It is our belief, based on our research and collaboration, that these recommendations offer paths forward that would significantly improve the status of Maine's women and girls—and by extension, our state as a whole.

Policy Recommendations

Dimension 1: Education

- Maine needs targeted policy choices that will positively affect elementary school reading levels and increase the number of high school graduates.
- Maine needs greater investments in traditionally female-dominated occupations to reflect the education obtained to hold such occupations. Potential remedies may include measures to offset student debt for women, who are steered toward (and, subsequently take out the same amount of loans for) academic programs that do not have comparable return on investment.
- Maine needs programs at the K-12 level to foster and develop STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) learning in girls.
- Maine needs to invest in quality early childhood education programs, in order to create better educational outcomes.

Dimension 2: Economic Security

- Maine should introduce new, or amend existing, policy that focuses on building economic security for women, including single mothers and caregivers, including:
 - Incentivizing child and elder-care by reforming the tax code to allow family members to make tax-deductible contributions to the caregiver’s qualified retirement plan, just as they could for themselves.
 - Pursuing policies that address the wage gap between men and women.
 - Exploring policies to alleviate the disparate impact on women and others who are required to leave the workplace due to caregiving duties, including policies that provide flexibility, support and options for the caregivers.
 - Accepting federal funds to provide health coverage to uninsured Mainers with low income who are in the “coverage gap.”
 - Providing family planning services, including access to contraception, STI testing, and cancer screenings for Medicaid (MaineCare) members with income up to 200% of the federal poverty level.
 - Increasing access to and support for low-income working mothers in postsecondary education through tuition assistance and needs-based aid and quality child-care.
 - Investing in programs that help pregnant and parenting teens and young mothers to achieve high school diplomas, and invest in supports for post-secondary education.
 - Providing safe, affordable and accessible housing for all Maine women.
 - Pursuing policies that ensure Mainers have access to healthy, nutritious food. Potential remedies include those proposed by the Task Force to End Student Hunger Report, which would increase children’s access to school meals including breakfast, lunch, after school snack or dinner, and summer meals.

Policies should reflect consideration for single mothers and caregivers who are unable to retain full-time employment due to caregiving responsibilities.

Dimension 3: Health

- Maine should accept federal funds to provide health coverage to ensure that people with low income have access to affordable health care, especially those with income below 100% of the federal poverty level who are in the “coverage gap” and unable to buy subsidized coverage through the Exchange or Marketplace.
- Maine should provide family planning services, including access to contraception, STI testing, and cancer screenings for Medicaid (MaineCare) members with income up to 200% of the federal poverty level.

- Maine should ensure that health care policies and priorities consider the financial and logistical limitations that are unique to Maine women, specifically women living in poverty, single mothers, and older women.
- Maine should 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.
- Maine should provide Medicaid (MaineCare) coverage for the full range of reproductive health services.
- Maine should foster recognition of the wide-ranging health impacts of domestic and sexual violence, and support polices to ensure screening for and trauma-informed responses to violence in all health care settings.

Dimension 4: Safety & Wellbeing

- Maine should pursue policies that reduce serious risk for victims and hold offenders accountable.
- All Maine employers should follow the lead of the State of Maine and develop workplace violence policies to address both the needs of victims and the presence of offenders in the workplace.
- Maine should foster recognition of the wide-ranging health impacts of domestic and sexual violence, and support polices to ensure screening for and trauma-informed responses to violence in all health settings.
- As the ability to attain an education is central to later economic security and overall wellbeing, all schools in Maine should develop and implement teen dating violence policies, and work should continue on the Act To Establish a Model Dating Violence Prevention Policy.
- Maine should pursue policies that will help victims of domestic and sexual violence and stalking gain and maintain safe, affordable housing. Potential remedies include extending the protections provided through the federal Violence Against Women Act to private rental housing.

Dimension 5: Leadership and Public Life

- Maine should make investments in opportunities for women and girls regarding leadership education and incentivize promotion of women into leadership roles, both in the public and private sectors.



INTRODUCTION

The Maine Legislature established the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women to be an independent advisory board charged with improving opportunities for women and girls in the State. In order to achieve this objective, the Commission is tasked with advising and consulting with the Governor and the Legislature about, and assisting them in improving, opportunities for women and girls in the State by:

- **Research.** Carrying out research programs necessary to determine the status of women in the State;
- **Activities.** Promoting and coordinating activities on state and local levels designed to meet the problems of women in the State;
- **Advocacy.** Serving as an advocate for women in making recommendations on proposed budgetary, legislative and policy actions to the Governor, the Legislature and other officials of the State and the Federal Government with respect to state and federal policies, programs and other activities affecting or relating to women in the State;
- **Information.** Informing the public about the presence or absence of opportunities for women in the State;
- **Meetings.** Conducting public hearings, conferences, workshops and other such meetings to obtain information about, discuss and publicize the needs of and solutions to the problems of women; and
- **Reports.** Making a biennial report to the Governor and the Legislature concerning the work and interests of the commission.



In this report, the Commission has compiled national and state research on the status of women and girls in Maine. We have sought to include information that will give readers both an overall picture of the challenges and opportunities that exist in our state, as well as highlight the personal viewpoints of Maine women and girls.

History & Methodology of the Report

In October 2012, the Commission completed its first biennial report to the Governor and the Legislature. The 2012 report, “The Status of Women and Girls in Maine,” examined the available data on five dimensions that contribute to the quality of life and opportunity for women and girls: Education; Economic Security; Health; Safety and Well-being; and Leadership and Public Life.

Standing alone, the report presented an incomplete picture of the lives of Maine women and girls. In addition to hard data, the Commission concluded there was a need to

document the actual voices of Maine women and girls. In doing so, the Commission would be better able to gauge the prevalence and depth of issues affecting them, and what steps might be taken to improve their lives. To collect this information, the Commission developed a grassroots survey loosely based on the 5 dimensions of the biennial report. Members of the Commission wrote all questions in the survey.

In 2014, the Commission used the 2012 survey as a baseline, making only minor modifications to the questions asked. Similar to what was done in 2012, the 2014 survey was distributed exclusively through a grassroots outreach effort by the Commission. The survey was designed in both an online and hard-copy (paper) format. A link to the survey and a downloadable PDF version were made available to the public on the Secretary of State's website from June 1 through June 30, 2014. In addition, the survey link and hard copies were sent to non-profit organizations, governmental advocacy groups, businesses, community outreach services, and individuals statewide. Phone calls were made to individuals and groups to inform the public about the presence and purpose of the survey. The reaction from Maine people was remarkably positive. More than 3,000 respondents completed the survey, with each county represented. Respondents included residents of all ages, income levels, political viewpoints, and life experiences.

The 2012 and 2014 surveys, though crafted over months of deliberation, were not designed to be a scientific resource but rather to gain a more thorough and personal understanding of the available data and statistics. The information collected by the survey provides insight into issues affecting Maine women and girls – as seen by them, as felt by them, and in their own words.

Survey Demographics

In creating and distributing the survey, the Commission made every effort to be as inclusive and representative as possible. The Commission was pleased to receive more than 3,000 survey responses from Maine residents. Demographic data regarding respondents revealed the following information.

- **Age of respondents:**

- 27.2% were under 34 years of age.
- 56.86% were between the ages of 35 and 64.
- 15.7% were 65 and older.

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 37.5% of Maine residents were under age 35, 43.8% were between the ages of 35 and 64, and 15.8% were 65 or older.

- **Race/ethnicity of respondents:**

- 92.98% identified as white or Caucasian (compared to 95.2% of Maine's total population, as reported by the 2010 US Census).
- 0.7% identified as Hispanic (compared to 1.3%).
- 0.9% identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native (compared to 1.1%).
- 1% identified as Asian (compared to 1.8%).
- 0.45% identified as Black or African American (compared to 1.4%).
- 2.6% identified as "other," or refused to answer.

When comparing the percentage of survey respondents' race to that of the state population, it is clear that in future surveys, the Commission will want to focus on obtaining more responses from minority groups in order to ensure that all voices are fairly represented.

- **Educational Achievement:**

(Respondents identified the highest degree or level of schooling they had completed.)

- 6.1% had either no schooling or some high school, but no diploma.
- 19.6% had a high school diploma and/or some college credit, but no degree.
- 7.78% had an Associate's degree.
- 31.6% had a Bachelor's degree.
- 34.92% had a Master's, Professional, or Doctoral degree.

- **Employment, Residence & Income:**

- 50.4% of respondents had full-time employment.
- 12.3% had part-time employment.
- The remaining 37.34% were self-employed, unemployed, unable to work due to disability, students, homemakers, or retired.

Surveys also asked respondents in which county they were employed. All counties were represented in survey results; however, the majority of respondents (27.2%) indicated that Cumberland was the county of their employment. Aroostook was the county in which the least number of respondents indicated they were employed (1%).

In addition, 10.9% of respondents indicated they were members in a labor union.

The above data coincides with information regarding respondents' residence. 31.55% indicated they lived in Cumberland County (slightly higher than the amount working in Cumberland, but relatively parallel.) The three counties with the next highest number of respondent residents were: Kennebec (11.7%), Penobscot (8.9%), and York (8.3%). The three counties with the least amount of respondent residents were: Somerset (1.7%), Franklin, (1.9%) and Washington (2.1%).

Additionally, respondents indicated the **approximate amount of their total family incomes:**

- 6.3% had household incomes of less than \$15,000
 - 22.9% had household incomes between 15,000 and 40,000
 - 32.2% had household incomes between 40,000 and 75,000
 - 28.3% had household incomes of more than 75,000
- (10.9% of respondents did not answer.)*

The Commission intends that the *2015 Report on the Status of Women and Girls in Maine*, which includes both the results of our grassroots survey, as well as the most updated national and state data available, will serve as a valuable tool in determining how Maine women and girls are faring, and how we as a state might improve their opportunities and ultimately the overall wellbeing of this great state.

DIMENSION 1: EDUCATION

Across the country and world, education is recognized as the foundation for economic development and social and political stability. This is especially true for women and girls, who have historically been excluded from educational opportunities but who play an increasing role in labor markets. A growing body of literature suggests that gender equity in education promotes overall economic growth.¹ Indeed, organizations across the globe dedicate themselves to advancing educational opportunities for girls as an effective means of increasing the larger community's welfare.



Maine 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. Starting in grade school, girls in Maine tend to achieve higher proficiency in reading than boys. A 2013 report surveying

Within the University of Maine System, women outnumbered men's graduation rates by nearly 2 to 1 at all degree levels from 2006 to 2011.... In 2010, more than half of women in Maine over the age of 25 had some college education and almost a third had a bachelor's or graduate degree.

Maine public school systems reported that by fourth grade, approximately 41% of girls are consistently reading at or above grade level proficiency and 47% are scoring proficient or higher for math. At a national level, 41% of fourth grade girls were at or above proficiency in math and 38% were at or above proficiency in reading. For 8th grade girls, the rates are 46% for reading and 37% for math, compared to 42% and 35% nationally.²

This has important implications for future success as research indicates that early skill development and education are critical predictors for long-term economic achievements. Approximately 85% of core brain structure is formed by the age of three years, and success in pre-high school grades is associated with achievement at post-high school levels.³ As part of its *Measures of Growth* report, the Maine Economic Growth Council recognizes fourth grade reading as the measure that best indicates future educational and economic success, as shown in the chart below:⁴

Male/Female and New England State Comparison⁵			
National Assessment of Education Progress Scores: Reading Achievement by the 4th Grade, 2011-2013			
Year	State	Percent of 4th Grade Females At or Above Reading Proficient	Percent of 4th Grade Males At or Above Reading Proficient
2013	Maine	41%	33%
	Connecticut	45%	40%
	Massachusetts	51%	44%
	New Hampshire	49%	40%
	Rhode Island	43%	32%
	Vermont	48%	37%
	National Rate	38%	32%
	2011	Maine	35%
Connecticut		46%	38%
Massachusetts		54%	47%
New Hampshire		50%	38%
Rhode Island		39%	32%
Vermont		45%	38%
National Rate		37%	31%

As girls in Maine age, they continue to demonstrate positive trends in accessing and completing post-high school education. Within the University of Maine System (UMS), women outnumbered men's graduation rates by nearly 2 to 1 at all degree levels from 2006 to 2011.⁶ In 2010, more than half of women in Maine over the age of 25 had some college education and almost a third had a bachelor's or graduate degree. Women's access and retention rates in post-high school education are the highest at the associate's level.⁷

The challenge for women and girls in Maine is that even among those who are able to successfully pursue higher education, they continue to do so via paths that lead to traditionally female-dominated occupations, which serve to keep their wages and income relatively low.

During the academic 2010-2011 year in the UMS, female graduates participated in greater numbers than males in lower-paying disciplines such as Social Science (56%), Education (73.5%), and Health (87%). Conversely, females represented far fewer than half of graduates in Math (35%), Physical Sciences (42%) and Engineering (19%).⁸ Much effort is being made to get more girls and women into STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) disciplines, in part because these are higher wage occupations and are in growing demand. Data from the UMS academic year 2010-2011 shows that women are increasing their degree attainment in STEM-related areas, with the exception of Architecture and related sciences and Communications Technologies. Males still exceed females in degrees in Engineering (81% men, 19% women),

Engineering-related (93% men, 7% women), Math (65% men, 35% women) and Computer Science (73% men, 27% women).⁹

For the relatively small number of women who do not complete high school, challenges to long-term economic security and success persist. In the 2012–2013 academic year, 88.37% of Maine’s female high school students graduated. This is an increase from the 2011–2012 figure of 87.33%, but still indicates that more than 10% of female students left school without a diploma.¹⁰ The potential for these women’s earnings to stagnate and their quality of life to be compromised is high.

Maine Women Speak... About Education

Survey answers seem to indicate that Maine women find other issues more challenging than educational barriers. Responses also suggest, however, that Maine women believe that to overcome the more challenging issues, educational opportunities must be present and accessible.

Survey participants were asked to identify the biggest challenge facing Maine women. Only 2.8% of the answers indicated that access to post-secondary education was the largest obstacle for Maine women and girls. Nevertheless, this does not signify that Maine women believe education is unimportant. On the contrary, almost 75% of respondents have a higher education degree. Respondents consistently identified cultural difficulties with regard to encouraging girls to pursue (and to remain within) Science, Technology, Engineering, & Math (STEM) education and higher-paying traditionally male disciplines.

Moreover, when asked what the Commission should focus on to make Maine better for women and girls, more than 50% of respondents answered that “educational opportunities” should be a primary focus, suggesting that a majority of respondents believe education is vital. Additionally, more than 70% of respondents said that “access to quality schools” was an “important to extremely important” element for Maine women’s economic security. Thus, an overwhelming majority of respondents believe that access to quality schools is, at least at some level, an important contributor to economic security.

Read in tandem, the report data and our survey results provide a glimpse of education’s role as it pertains to Maine women and girls. The survey results showed that education and access to quality schools (though not specifically post-secondary education) are considered valuable to improving the lives of Maine women and girls, and are areas where the Commission should focus its efforts.

“While women have made great strides in the field of education to balance their male counterparts within educational institutions, there are still significant cultural hierarchies in place that support a male dominated society. I believe that these differences stem from inadequacies in female upbringing that provide for inherent female subordination.”

–Survey Participant

DIMENSION 2: ECONOMIC SECURITY

Economic security means having access to a variety of resources sufficient to meet one's basic needs for clothing, housing, food, and health care. While this term may be contemporary, the concept is not. Common wisdom and the supporting research recognize that economic security provides a foundation for overall status and wellbeing. Monetary resources are a key to this economic security, and are typically secured through employment and income.

While education can provide an important pathway for women and girls towards economic stability, educational attainment alone does not guarantee it. Factors such as actual wages, age, lifespan, and family composition can all significantly influence and shape women's economic stability.



For more than a decade in Maine, as in the country, women's participation in the labor force has risen steadily. Rates of poverty, homelessness and unemployment, however, have not diminished as a result. While some of these trends mirror national statistics, women and girls in Maine also face unique challenges and opportunities, given the older, rural nature of our state.

A recent study reports that the wage gap begins in earnest for women in their 30's, coincidental with child-rearing years, indicating the impact of childcare on economic potential at all socioeconomic levels.¹¹ Moreover, access to preventative and reproductive health care for women can be the most significant factor in her ability to obtain and maintain economic security.

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR)¹² shows the following data points on the Status of Women in Maine as of 2004, comparing the status of women in Maine within the 6 New England states as a region, and the 51 states:

	National Rank	Regional Rank
Composite Employment and Earnings Index	27 th	6 th
Women's Median Annual Earnings, 2002 (\$26,900)	35 th	6 th
Women's Labor Force Participation, 2002 (61% of women)	21 st	5 th
Women in Managerial and Professional Occupations, 2001 (33.5%)	19 th	6 th
Composite Social and Economic Autonomy Index	28 th	6 th
Percent of Women above the Poverty Level, 2002 (88%)	29 th	6 th

According to IWPR, Maine ranks lowest on almost all of their key economic indicators compared to the other 5 New England States, and in the bottom of two-thirds of those indicators compared to the rest of the United States and District of Columbia.

Employment

Women make up just less than half of the labor force in Maine, work for nominally lower wages than their male counterparts, and account for less than half of the State's unemployed. Women, however, also represent more than half of Maine's part-time workers. Part-time work is associated with lower wages and often offers little or no non-monetary benefits such as health insurance, paid sick time, retirement plans, or disability insurance. Lack of paid sick time, for example, can put a mother's job at risk or at the least reduce her income when she has to miss work to care for a sick child. Lack of retirement plans mean women rely to a greater degree on social security income in their later years. So, while girls and women in Maine are employed, many are in jobs that do not lead to long-term economic security and success.

- In 2010, females made up 49% of the state's overall labor force and 61% of females 16 years and older were in the Maine labor force.¹³
- In the same year, women made up only 42% of the State's 57,000 unemployed, and reported an unemployment rate slightly lower than that of men, 7% vs. 9%.¹⁴

Maine is a largely rural state, ranking 38th in the United States for population density. It is estimated that approximately 60% of Maine's population lives in rural areas and the rural counties in Maine tend to have higher rates of poverty and lower median incomes.¹⁵ Employment opportunities in Maine are often limited by its rural nature and corresponding low population.

Due in part to both necessity and cultural values, Maine has a long and deep history of entrepreneurship. Maine is a small business state with over 171,000 small or micro businesses (fewer than 4 employees) and more than 100,000 self-employed individuals.¹⁶ Women are part of this economic engine: in 2013, women-owned businesses accounted for 26% of firms in Maine; 20% of firms were co-owned by women and men.¹⁷

Recent trends, however, suggest Maine women-owned businesses (WOB) have room to grow, compared to other states. Between 1997 and 2012, Maine ranked 41st in the rate of growth in the number of women owned firms, and 50th in the growth in revenues among WOB.¹⁸

In the *Report on the State of Women Owned Businesses, A Summary of Important Trends 1997-2011*, Maine is cited as among the five states where women-owned firms lag far behind national averages in revenue growth (12.9% growth in revenues compared to national average of 53.4% growth).¹⁹

There is, however, a bright spot in the midst of the low percentages: increasing numbers of women are seeking opportunity in one of Maine's traditional industries – agriculture. The number of farms owned by women grew from 1,559 in 2002 to 2043 farms in 2007. The number of young women entering farming is also increasing.²⁰

Wages and Income

Though women have increased their education and labor force participation, these achievements have not eliminated wage inequities nationally or in Maine. In Maine, the 2010 wage gap based on gender was 79%, almost two percent higher than the national average. This means for every dollar earned by a man, a woman earns only 79 cents for the same or equivalent work.²¹ The reasons for these trends are complex, and while they can be partially accounted for due to disparities in earnings and to the type of work in which women tend to engage, it is essential to consider the impact of institutionalized discrimination when considering the pay gap.

The persistent gender wage gap has serious short- and long-term implications for women's economic stability. In the short-term, the inequity of wages makes meeting basic needs more difficult and contributes to rates of poverty and reliance on government-funded programs. In the long-term, Maine's wage gap accounts for losses of hundreds of thousands of dollars over a lifetime, including depressed Social Security earnings and other retirement safety nets.

At all levels of education, women across the United States earned only 77% of what their male counterparts earned in 2009. In Maine, the largest earning differences are between men and women with graduate degrees, a difference of almost \$19,000 in annual median earnings.

Pay inequity can be partly attributed to the fact that women tend to pursue employment paths in lower-wage arenas such as the service industry, sales occupations, social services, non-leadership roles in the health care industry, and the education field. Conversely, women's participation rates are low in occupations with higher earning potential.

The five occupational areas with the greatest annual earnings for women in Maine are computer/mathematics; architecture/engineering; legal occupations; health care practitioner/technical professions; and life, physical, and social sciences.²²

Age and Lifespan

Age and lifespan are also influencing factors in women's economic standing, and have a direct impact on women's income. As people age their sources of income change, shifting away from reliance on earned wages to dependence on retirement accounts and social security benefits. Already discussed in this report, women's retirement holdings are negatively impacted by their employment participation trends and the gender wage gap. This, in part, accounts for women's heavy reliance on Social Security benefits in later life, and yet Social Security income is increasingly ineffective in helping women achieve and sustain economic stability.

Maine is the oldest state in the nation.²³ Just over half (51%) of the state's 1.32 million residents are female, and women make up approximately 56% of Mainers aged 65 or older.²⁴ Women also live approximately 5 years longer, on average, than their male counterparts.²⁵

In 2009, it was estimated that more than a third (38%) of Maine's older population would be living at or below the federal poverty line if not for receiving Social Security and a third of all older people in Maine rely on Social Security as their *only* source of income.²⁶ For women, the situation is more dramatic. In 2010, while 111,161 Maine women received Social Security benefits (compared to 88,021 men), they received lower benefit rates than men and were more likely to report Social Security as their only income.²⁷ Together, these numbers tell a story of women in Maine

whose economic stability is directly impacted by how old they are and how long they live. As women age, their access to economic safety nets is decreased compared to their male counterparts and their safety nets are smaller. Further, because women live longer than men, their need for income spans greater periods of time, perpetuating rates of poverty into later life.



- In Maine, the average Social Security benefit for women 65 and older is \$11,000 a year, compared to almost \$15,000 provided to men 65 years and older.²⁸
- The median income for women who are 65 years and older and live alone is just over \$17,000, and for their male counterparts it is \$26,000.²⁹ This means that Social Security benefits represent 65% of single, older women's total income and only 58% of single, older men's.

Family Composition

Family composition and roles in family life can significantly shape the types of education and employment opportunities available to women and girls, and can ultimately determine their long-term economic stability. While trends in male participation in caregiving and other domestic responsibilities are certainly changing, women continue to be the primary caregivers of both children and aging parents, and are more likely than men to be the single heads of household.³⁰ This may account for the fact that 13.7% of females in Maine are living under the federal poverty threshold compared to only 12.1% of males.³¹ Single women with families experience higher rates of poverty, homelessness, and lack of food security than those of single men with families.



Women head the overwhelming majority of single-parent households.³² These households experience more and deeper levels of poverty, and most have very young children. Thus, the poorest families in Maine are those headed by single mothers who have very young children. The responsibilities of caregiving and the high cost of childcare contribute to poor economic standing by interfering with women's ability to work full-time. The responsibilities also hinder the ability to seek employment in higher-paying

industries, which tend to require longer hours and offer less predictable schedules.

Among families headed by single mothers in Maine:

- 39% are living in poverty,³³ and
- 58% of households with young children (under 5 years old) are living in poverty.³⁴

Women in Maine are more likely to work part-time than men, and when asked, part-time female workers in the State report "family obligations" as the number one reason they are not engaged in full-time employment. Researchers support this finding and suggest that the traditional division of labor within the home serves to keep women from devoting substantial time to labor market work.

Nationally, women make up the majority of workers in low-wage jobs (typically making \$10.10 an hour or less). In fact, nationally, women make up 76% of the workers in the ten largest low-wage jobs. These jobs tend to have less flexibility and fewer non-monetary benefits, including the flexibility for the worker to tend to unscheduled caregiving responsibilities. Low-wage workers are more likely to work part-time involuntarily (or be "underemployed"). Over time, this translates to decreased employment stability and fewer accumulated monetary resources.³⁵

Women running households alone are also more likely to need government assistance to get by financially. The federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF) provides some financial assistance to poor and low-income families, for basic needs such as food and housing. In Maine, 92% of families receiving TANF were headed by women, the vast majority of which were single mothers raising very young children.³⁶ While TANF plays an important role for these families, benefits are time limited and assistance levels do not adequately cover the cost of all basic needs.

The percentage of Mainers without food security has increased from an average of 13.3% (2005-2007) to 15.4% (2008-2010). The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food security as "access by all people at all times to enough food for an active, healthy life." Maine ranks sixth to last in the nation for "very low food security" with 6.8% of the State's residents struggling every day to put food on the table. Nationally, 35% of households headed by single mothers report being without food security.³⁷ According to Good Shepherd Food Bank, nearly 60% of those who relied on the food bank in had to choose between eating and heating their homes during the winter.³⁸

In 2014, about 37% of people identified by MaineHousing as homeless in the state were women and girls.³⁹ The National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty has identified domestic violence as a leading cause of homelessness, especially for women.⁴⁰

Maine Women Speak... About Economic Security

As described above, Maine women face many obstacles to economic security, especially later in life. The single most commonly mentioned issue across all survey responses was Maine's lack of livable wage jobs. The survey also highlighted additional challenges facing Maine's older female population.

Issues Affecting the Economic Security of Maine's Older Adult Women

The lack of economic security for Maine's elderly women often begins prior to retirement. Hundreds of survey respondents commented on the inequality of pay between men and women, and how it leads to financial uncertainty later in life. The less money a woman makes in her lifetime, the less money she will be able to save, and the less money she will receive in social security. 38.3% of survey respondents believe that by 2020, the economic security of elderly Maine women will be considerably worse than other states; 33.2% believe that it will at least be "a little worse" than other states.

Common themes regarding the poor financial outlook ran throughout respondents' observations. Most prevalent were concerns that many of Maine's older adults live in rural areas that have limited, if any, public transportation. Lack of transportation becomes a serious issue when older adults are no longer physically or financially able to operate a car – as one respondent wrote, *"living in Maine without a car is nearly impossible."* The lack of transportation for older women in rural areas not only subjects them to social isolation and makes them more vulnerable to abuse, but also limits their access to health care, potential employment, and fresh food.

"We need to find a way to build up the economic infrastructure of the state. Young people are leaving the state. With fewer young people the state will have a very difficult time maintaining its support for its entire elderly population."

–Survey Participant

When asked what challenge facing Maine's older adult population was of most concern, 56.2% of all respondents found it to be lack of adequate income. Moreover, 54.7% of respondents over the age of 65 said that the greatest challenge facing older women is lack of adequate income. One respondent wrote that economic security for aging women in Maine *"...would have to start with "livable-wage jobs" earlier in life."* Without enough money, it is likely that older Maine women will face tough choices regarding—among other things—housing and health care.

The next greatest challenge facing elderly Maine women, according to 19.1% of respondents, is lack of access to quality health care – another important factor in overall economic security. One Maine woman wrote: *"Many have to continue to work well into retirement for financial and medical reasons (insurance). So improving those areas would benefit*

them greatly.” Many other respondents also indicated that often, older adults have to choose between paying taxes, and paying for medical assistance and healthy food.

Not all those surveyed felt that the situation of older women in Maine was quite so bleak. Many respondents indicated that the community-oriented nature of Maine helps support older adults who may be struggling. Wrote one survey participant:

“Maine is such a poor state as it is, and many of the jobs available are less than full-time, and certainly less than a living wage. Almost no one I know has a retirement account, which means they will be financially challenged once they retire.”

—Survey Participant

Maine’s elderly women are proud, tough and resilient, and used to making do. Many live on their own, in rural areas, without ‘support systems.’ Maine should value this population cohort, and be sure that a little bit of help such as transportation or home care can be accessed easily to ensure they can live out their days at home and not be institutionalized.”

While there are Maine communities that provide adequate support for senior women, survey results highlight a concern that there are many older women who exist independent of such communities of support.

Issues Affecting the Economic Security of Maine’s Younger Women

Many of the economic challenges faced by older women originate years before retirement age. The wage gap between men and women, lack of quality childcare, and single-parent households all affect a women’s capacity to earn a livable wage and save money for future economic security. What’s more, many respondents expressed concern that young Maine women move out of state to pursue job

opportunities – many times, parting from their aging parents who are at risk for economic insecurity themselves. *“The availability of full-time jobs that provide benefits is sorely lacking for everyone, male and female, young and old, in Maine, regardless of education level and work experience,”* one survey participant wrote.

When asked to identify the six most important elements for achieving economic security, survey respondents chose: access to quality affordable health care, access to affordable heating fuel, access to affordable housing, employment opportunities, personal safety, and access to healthy, affordable food.

Many people wrote that equal pay was at the forefront of economic security challenges; others wrote that livable-wage jobs that offered family-friendly personnel policies were lacking, and needed. Wrote one participant: *“If women feel their children are safe and well-cared for or they can provide that in addition to being able to work, they may be more apt to be more involved in their communities, leadership, ownership of making their lives better for themselves, their families and others.”* Another participant wrote: *“Again, jobs that pay a living wage are the most necessary item. Too many women are working 2-3 part-time (and*

“Our primary concern should be caring for and educating young people so that they graduate, find good jobs, and remain in the state.”

—Survey Participant

sometimes seasonal) jobs and are still unable to support their families. More people would stay in the state if there were decent job opportunities there.”

An overwhelming number of respondents indicated that there was no “one way” to improve women’s economic security. Rather, all issues affecting women and their families need to be addressed in order to truly advance their opportunities. Maine needs to recognize, respondents said, that women deserve equal pay, a safe environment in which to live, access to health care, education, childcare, leadership opportunities and transportation – and more. *“I wish I could select all of these, but, realistically, even three seems like a pipe-dream,”* wrote one respondent. Another echoed the sentiment: *“Choosing only 3 is difficult. Studies show, without solid - safe housing, consistent quality food, education, and access to health care, girls and young ladies cannot succeed with education, which leads to leadership opportunities. Children worry about what their parents can and can't provide, including childcare for younger siblings, the older child becomes the nanny and caretaker while mom works, thus shortens her ability to focus on her studies.”*

DIMENSION 3: HEALTH

The health of women and girls in Maine is a key factor that contributes to or detracts from their ability to pursue opportunities for education, employment, and leadership. It also affects a woman’s ability to support herself and her family. Ultimately, health determines a woman’s ability to contribute her fullest to society.



Access to Health Care

Access to health coverage is essential to the overall health and wellbeing of Maine women and girls. The United States has made significant progress toward achieving universal access to health care and reducing the number of uninsured with the 2010 passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and its full implementation in 2014, expanding access to coverage for more than 15 million Americans. In the first open enrollment period, 44,258 individuals in Maine enrolled in a plan through the new Health Insurance Marketplace. Of those, 90% received financial assistance and 54% were female.⁴¹ In addition to expanding coverage options, the ACA has leveled the playing field for women buying their own health insurance: the law prohibits gender rating, the practice of charging women more than men; bans companies from denying coverage of pre-existing conditions such as diabetes or cancer; and requires insurance companies to cover essential health benefits including prescription drugs, mental health care, and maternity care.

The ACA also requires health plans to cover most preventive health services without deductibles, coinsurance or co-pays. 138,000 women in Maine have already benefitted through increased preventive care such as mammograms and other cancer screenings; nutrition counseling and obesity screening; cholesterol and blood pressure screening; and tobacco-use counseling.⁴² The ACA provides additional support to pregnant women, requiring plans to cover folic acid supplements and gestational diabetes screenings, and benefits new mothers by requiring all plans to cover breastfeeding

equipment and supplies. Intimate partner violence screenings, and prescription, FDA-approved contraception must also be covered with no cost sharing.

While the ACA has greatly improved women's access to affordable coverage and reduced longstanding discriminatory practices in health insurance, obstacles to care remain, especially for women living in poverty and for those who do not have coverage.

Since the Commission's 2012 Report, Maine's percentage of uninsured has moved in the wrong direction: 11.2 % of Maine's population was uninsured in 2013, up a percentage point from 2012, compared to 13.4% nationally.⁴³

Maine has declined to expand its Medicaid program to cover adults with income below 138% of the federal poverty level (approximately \$11,670 a year), as was originally intended by the ACA. To date, 27 states and the District of Columbia have chosen to accept federal funds to provide coverage through their states' Medicaid programs. Maine is the only state in New England that hasn't accepted these funds, a decision that may be negatively impacting Maine women's health.

There are disparities between low-income women who are insured and those without coverage:

- For women in Maine, cost is a major barrier to care – over 43 percent of uninsured women have faced cost as an obstacle when seeking care, compared to only 13 percent of insured women.
- Uninsured women use preventive services at lower rates; only 50 percent of uninsured women in Maine received a recommended mammogram compared to 78 percent of insured women.
- Only 47 percent of uninsured women received a recommended colorectal cancer screening compared to 75 percent of insured women.
- More than twice as many insured women (46.4 percent) as uninsured women (22.4 percent) received a seasonal flu shot or flu vaccine (nasal spray) in the past year.
- Additionally, only 68 percent of uninsured women are receiving a recommended Pap test compared to 86 percent of insured women in Maine.⁴⁴

The most recent (2011) Maine Women's Health Report presented by the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention,⁴⁵ provides an in-depth look at the health status of women and girls, including mental and physical wellbeing, reproductive health, substance use and abuse, chronic disease, injury, and healthy activities including preventive care services across the lifespan, by education levels and other demographics.

Health Risk Factors/Chronic Disease

There are a number of factors that contribute to increased health risks for women including lifestyle, socio-economic status, education level and geography, among others. Other factors to be considered are diet and exercise, access to preventive care, and health promotion to women and girls.⁴⁶

As is the case nationally, challenges with achieving healthy weight and higher physical activity levels are widespread health concerns for women and girls in Maine. Almost

60% of women in Maine were overweight and obese; 30.2% were overweight and 27.4% were obese in 2011.⁴⁷ For Maine as a whole, 65% of adults were overweight or obese, which is close to the national rate. The Maine Economic Growth Council again gave this measure a red flag in its 2013 report.⁴⁸

The three leading causes of death in Maine – heart disease, cancer, and stroke – parallel the national leading causes of death. The types of cancer-related deaths that are most common in Maine and the U.S. are lung cancer and breast cancer.

Reproductive Health

Access to reproductive health care is also critical to women's overall health and economic security. Having access to a full range of reproductive health care, including abortion care, empowers women to make personal decisions about when and if to start a family.

It is also important to recognize the connection between reproductive health and women's safety. Perpetrators of domestic violence often seek control over women's reproductive health and choices, in a process known as Reproductive Coercion. Pregnant women in abusive relationships face particular risks. Homicide is the second leading cause of traumatic death for pregnant and recently pregnant women in the United States.⁴⁹

85% of Maine women ages 18 and older have had a pap smear within the last 3 years. For women with income below \$15,000, this percentage drops considerably, to 71.8%.⁵⁰

Currently, Maine's Medicaid program covers medical care for pregnant women with income up to 200% of the poverty level. However, it only covers family planning services, such as contraception, cancer screening, and sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing for women up to 133% of the poverty level. Access to contraception reduces the instances of unintended pregnancy and its associated costs. By expanding access to family planning, Maine can expect to see a cost savings. Family planning services include routine cervical and breast cancer screenings, which help with early detection and treatment.⁵¹ To date, Maine is one of just 11 states that have neither expanded their Medicaid program nor chosen to provide access to comprehensive family planning services under Medicaid.

In 2008, 46% of pregnancies in Maine were unintended. There were 9,000 unintended pregnancies to women in Maine, producing an unintended pregnancy rate of 36 per 1,000 women of reproductive age.⁵²

The Maine birthrate for teens ages 15-19 was 19.4 births per 1000 teen girls in 2012 – significantly lower than the national rate of 29.4 per 1000, which has been steadily decreasing over the last decade⁵³. 29.5% of high school teens surveyed reported using birth control pills before their last sexual intercourse to prevent pregnancy; 63.9% used condoms.⁵⁴



Breastfeeding is common in Maine, with 81.7% of women reporting having ever breastfed their babies.⁵⁵

Mental Health

Women are more likely to experience certain types of mental illnesses than men and like other chronic conditions, women who are older, unmarried, poor and have less education are at greater risk for certain mental health issues. Mental health conditions, including depression and anxiety, are common among pregnant, postpartum, and non-pregnant women of reproductive age. Poor mental health may adversely affect women's work and family life and is also associated with substance use and may put women at risk for future chronic disease, such as diabetes and heart disease.⁵⁶

More than 1 in 4 Maine women have ever been diagnosed with depression and more than 1 in 5 have ever been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder. There is a clear gender gap with respect to how Maine women self-report mental health. On average, Maine women reported 4.27 days in the past month for which mental health was not good compared to men who reported 3.08 days. This measure also reveals an income-based disparity – for individuals (both men and women) with income below \$15,000, the mean increased to 8.39 days, compared with 2.17 days for those making \$50,000 or more. Similarly, individuals who did not graduate high school reported worse mental health – 6.69 days per month, compared with 2.57 days for those who graduated from college or technical school. Finally, individuals who reported their sexual orientation as “homosexual or gay or lesbian”, “bisexual,” or “other,” suffered worse mental health, reporting 5.10, 7.49, and 7.18 days, respectively, compared with those identifying as “heterosexual or straight” which was 3.6 days.⁵⁷

According to the 2013 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey:

- 18.2% of high school girls surveyed seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year (reflecting a 3.6% increase since 2009), compared to 11.1% of high school boys.
- 22.4% of middle school girls surveyed have ever seriously considered attempting suicide, compared with 11.5% of middle school boys.

Finally, as noted below in the Safety and Wellbeing section, women are more vulnerable to domestic and sexual violence and suffer greater mental health problems as a result. On average nationally, over half of women seen in mental health settings either currently are experiencing or have experienced abuse by an intimate partner.⁵⁸ Women who experience sexual violence are more likely to have substance abuse issues: 28.7% of female sexual assault survivors in Maine report they drank heavily in the past month (compared to 4.4% of individuals who have never been sexually assaulted).⁵⁹

Maine's Aging Population and Health

Women also face health challenges as they grow older. As noted in the *Economic Security* section of this report, Maine is the oldest state in the nation.⁶⁰ Women live longer than men; older women are more likely than older men to live in poverty and to live alone.

As of 2010, the life expectancy of women in Maine was 81.5 years compared to that of men, at 76.8 years.⁶¹

Maine Women Speak... About their Health

In the survey, participants repeatedly highlighted the need for access to quality health care. People selected health care as the most important element of women's economic security, as the second biggest challenge facing older women, and as the number one issue the Commission should focus on to make Maine better for women and girls. Additionally, more than 10 percent of respondents indicated that the greatest challenge facing Maine girls (under 18) was access to sexual education and reproductive health care. One participant wrote: *"I do not believe that women in the state of Maine have enough access to reproductive health care. The need to access birth control/abortion services and health screening is a growing concern in Maine."*

What's more, it is clear from the survey that people feel there is a shortage of health care services – both in their availability and accessibility. In fact, when asked "Is there any other issue facing Maine women and girls that needs attention?" numerous respondents mentioned drug abuse and the need for aligning counseling services – especially with Maine's younger female population. In the words of one respondent: *"I work with children who have behavioral health challenges. I have seen a lot of children come from disruptive families where they do not have appropriate role models or support structures. I can do only so much in the community and school but wish there was more support to teach these parents and families how to BE families and be role models, and better programs for drug and alcohol rehabilitation."* Another respondent wrote: *"Alcohol and substance abuse rehab is inadequate and fails to focus enough attention on underlying mental health issues. Mental health services that accept only MaineCare do a disservice to working women who would benefit from those services (or are in desperate need) and are unable to afford them elsewhere."*

According to survey participants, making safe and healthy lifestyle choices is the biggest challenge facing Maine's under-18 population. Fewer participants noted the need for healthy food and lifestyle choices. It was, however, mentioned by several respondents that programs educating Maine women and girls regarding these issues would be beneficial. 28.1% of respondents said the Commission should focus on access to healthy food in order to make Maine a better place for women and girls. Almost 1,200 respondents said that access to healthy food was "important to extremely important" for a woman's economic security.

A substantial number of respondents highlighted a need for greater access to dental care. One respondent wrote: *"Access to affordable dental care...is a big issue that [a]ffects someone's overall health. Many women delay this care. MaineCare doesn't pay for preventative*

"The failure to expand MaineCare is a big problem. Many women and girls are not making enough for government subsidies to buy health care [on the Marketplace] and are stuck going without coverage... OR paying full-price for expensive plans with poor coverage."

–Survey Participant

[care]. Routine dental care is expensive. As a society, we need to decide what is important. Everyone should have a basic health care/dental plan/equal access.”

DIMENSION 4: SAFETY & WELLBEING

Maine is consistently rated as one of the safest places to live in the United States.⁶² Yet Maine women still face a persistent threat of violence. Domestic abuse, sexual violence, and stalking have far-reaching impacts on Maine women and girls. Our society has become more aware of the full impact of exposure to violence beyond the immediate safety concerns presented by the violence itself, including implications for physical, reproductive and emotional health; economic wellbeing; educational success and employment.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence continues to be a major threat to women in Maine, as in the rest of the country. Nationally, 1 in 4 women have been the victims of severe physical violence by an intimate partner.⁶³ Nearly half of women who experience intimate partner violence (IPV) experienced psychological aggression and 41.1% reported experiencing some form of coercive control within an intimate relationship.⁶⁴ Women are disproportionately affected by intimate partner violence.

While the precise extent of domestic abuse in Maine is hard to determine, there are indicators that give us a good sense of the scope. In Maine in 2013, a domestic violence assault was reported to the police every 1 hour and 35 minutes, creating a total of 5,487 criminal offenses. This reflects 47.0% of all assaults committed in that year.⁶⁵ While domestic violence assaults have slightly decreased over the past several years, crime statistics reflect only part of the problem. According to the Maine Crime Victimization Survey, only two thirds of violent crimes are reported to law enforcement.⁶⁶

The number of victims seeking services at Maine’s domestic violence resource centers allows us a fuller sense of the extent of abuse in Maine. During 2014, Maine’s domestic violence resource centers worked with 12,399 people affected by domestic abuse. Of the people who contacted the centers, 11,916 were adults—primarily women—and 483 were children.⁶⁷

While domestic violence and abuse span economic, ethnic, and racial spectrums, certain populations are more at risk and/or more vulnerable to serious impact from the violence they experience. According to national statistics, Native women experience heightened risk for IPV and minority women may be at more at risk for serious domestic violence.⁶⁸ Nationally, of women who have experienced IPV, more than 1 in 5 experienced it for the first time between the ages of 11 and 17 years. Almost half of those women were between 18 and 24 when they first experienced abuse.⁶⁹ Domestic violence can and does occur at any age, up to and including the elder years.



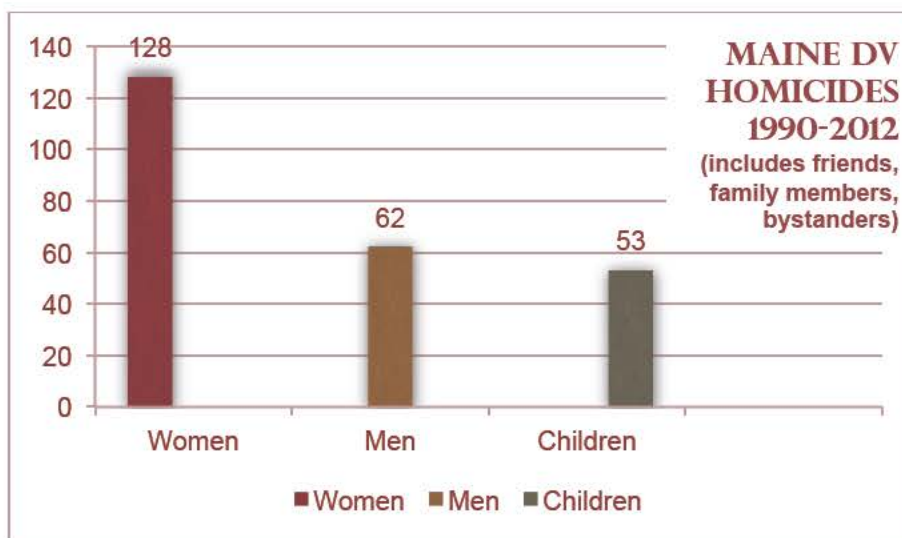
In addition, children and teens exposed to IPV face significant challenges. Young people in Maine are exposed to domestic abuse between parents or caregivers, and can also experience abuse directly in their own dating relationships. Children exposed to domestic violence are at risk for a variety of adverse impacts, including greater risk of serious adult health problems, increased aggression, and failure to thrive.⁷⁰ The good news is, children are resilient. More and more research is being done on the factors that help children heal, and how appropriate interventions can increase resiliency and mitigate the negative impacts of exposure to domestic violence.⁷¹

Increasingly, we understand the long-term health impacts of exposure to domestic violence, which extend far beyond the immediate impacts of physical trauma. Women who experience domestic violence are at increased risk for a variety of health conditions, including frequent headaches, chronic pain, and gastrointestinal issues; unplanned pregnancy; substance abuse; and anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. On average nationally, over half of women seen in mental health settings either currently are experiencing or have experienced abuse by an intimate partner.⁷²

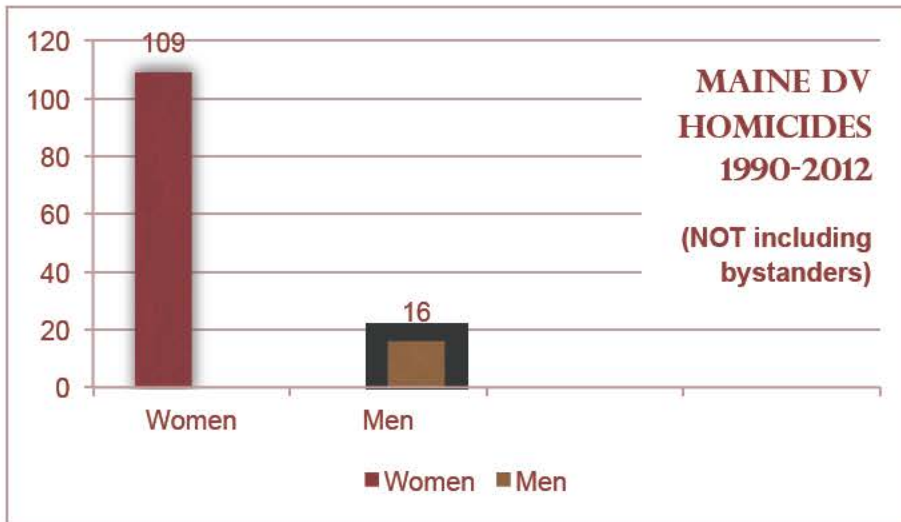
Domestic abuse has a clear impact on the economic wellbeing of women and children in Maine. Victims of domestic abuse reported that obtaining and keeping a job was difficult; 60% of victims surveyed experienced losing a job and up to 96% reported a range of difficulties related to the actions of an abuser.⁷³

The availability of safe, affordable housing is a major barrier for victims in Maine, and a key influence on their ability to escape abuse. While Maine's domestic violence resource centers provide housing services, they are unable to meet the need. On just one day in September of 2013, 11 requests for either short- or long-term housing were unable to be met by the resource centers.⁷⁴

Domestic violence homicides make up approximately half of Maine's homicides annually, a reality that has remained unchanged for many years.⁷⁵ Domestic violence homicides in Maine have a disproportionate impact on women. The chart below shows 22 years of data on domestic violence homicides broken down by gender, as reported by Maine Department of Public Safety⁷⁶:

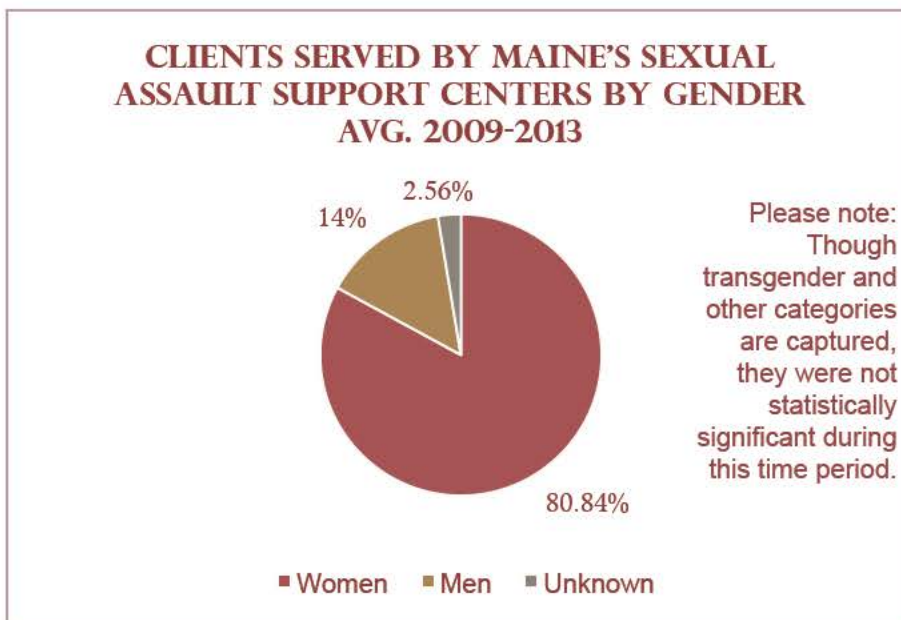


While the previous chart indicates a gender difference, it also includes bystanders—friends, family members, or others—killed during a domestic violence homicide. The gendered dynamic becomes even clearer in the following chart, in which the bystanders are removed:



Sexual Violence

Maine women and girls experience sexual violence regardless of socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, age, or sexual orientation. Men and boys also experience sexual violence, but women and girls experience sexual violence at a much higher rate. According to a recent Maine study, 32.1% of females surveyed and 5.3% of males surveyed have experienced rape or sexual assault at some point in their lives.⁷⁷ Sexual violence often results in long-term negative emotional, social, and economic issues for individuals, families, and communities.



Sexual violence is the most underreported violent crime in the United States.⁷⁸ In 2013, 359 rapes and attempted rapes were reported to Maine law enforcement,⁷⁹ and yet according to the Maine Crime Victimization Survey, approximately 13,000 Mainers experience some type of sexual violence each year.⁸⁰

Sexual violence is an umbrella term describing a variety of different victimizations, including rape, sexual and street harassment, gender-based harassment, sex trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, child sexual abuse, elder abuse, sexual coercion, intimate partner sexual violence, sexual abuse by a caregiver, drug- and alcohol-facilitated sexual assault, and others.

Sexual violence occurs across the life span and life experience. A recent national study estimates that 42.2% of female rape victims were raped before the age of 18 and 27.8% of male victims were first raped when they were ten years old or younger.⁸¹

Approximately 7.7% of Maine high school students (10.7% of girls and 4.7% of boys) report that they have been physically forced to have sexual intercourse. Approximately 9.9% of Maine high school students (14% of girls and 5.8% of boys) report that they have been forced – physically or otherwise – to have sexual contact.⁸²

Maine's Children's Advocacy Centers (designed to facilitate investigations of child sexual abuse in a child-friendly environment) report that in 2013, 61.8% of the children they served were females.⁸³ Among older adults, research has shown that between 1 and 2 million Americans age 65 or older have been injured, exploited, or otherwise mistreated by someone on whom they depended for care or protection.⁸⁴ Additional research on elder women in Maine is needed to further understand this problem, especially with regard to sexual violence.

Maine women and girls also experience high levels of sexual harassment and non-assault sexual victimization. A study of working Maine teens found that 33% of girls who participated in the survey experienced sexual harassment while at work, resulting in lower self-esteem, poorer physical and mental health, and trauma symptoms.⁸⁵ Approximately 17.7% of Maine high school students (22.2% of girls and 13.2% of boys) report that they are the victims of sexual comments at school or on the way to and from school.⁸⁶

Some populations are at particular risk for sexual assault or certain kinds of victimization. Homeless women and girls are at significant risk for sexual assault and sex exploitation. A Maine study found that of the women interviewed, 44% were sexually assaulted since becoming homeless.⁸⁷ Although sexual violence can happen to anyone regardless of race or ethnicity, Native women and girls experience sexual violence at a higher rate than their white counterparts. Over one-fourth of Native women and girls have experienced rape and half of Native women and girls have experienced sexual violence other than rape.⁸⁸

The impacts of sexual violence are devastating and manifest through severe psychological distress and symptoms including depression, anxiety, suicide attempts, and overall significant mental and physical health problems.⁸⁹ In Maine, 48.6% of adult sexual assault survivors report that they have been diagnosed as depressed, as opposed

to 17.5% individuals who have never been sexually assaulted.⁹⁰ Additionally, 38.3% of adult Maine sexual assault survivors report that they have ever been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, as opposed to 14.2% of individuals who have never been sexually assaulted.⁹¹ Women who experience sexual violence are also more likely to have substance abuse issues: 28.7% of female sexual assault survivors in Maine report they drank heavily in the past month (compared to 4.4% of individuals who have never been sexually assaulted).⁹²

Victims of sexual violence also experience negative economic impacts. Nationally, rape is one of the most costly violent crimes, costing victims \$127 billion annually. It is exceeded only by the costs associated with childhood sexual abuse.⁹³ Approximately 60.4% of sexual violence victims missed 1-5 days of work, 16.7% missed 6-10 days of work, and 22.4% missed 11-plus days of work during the year after they were sexually assaulted.⁹⁴

Stalking

Approximately 17% of Maine women surveyed by the Maine Crime Victimization Survey experienced stalking.⁹⁵ Stalking, like sexual violence and domestic violence, results in serious mental and physical impacts. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, women have a significantly higher lifetime incidence of stalking than do men.⁹⁶

Stalking often co-occurs with domestic and sexual violence. Nationally, 66 percent of female stalking victims are stalked by a current or former intimate partner.⁹⁷ Approximately 31% of victims who have been stalked by a current or former intimate partner were also sexually assaulted by that partner.⁹⁸ Offenders who stalk their spouse or partner are six times more likely to sexually assault them.⁹⁹ Like the impacts experienced by victims of domestic and sexual violence, most stalking victims experience anxiety, insomnia, severe depression, and loss of work or school time as a result of being stalked. One in seven victims relocates as a result of stalking.¹⁰⁰ Stalking victimization is reported at a rate of 24.5% for youth 18 to 24 years old compared to decreasing rates as people age.¹⁰¹

Maine Women Speak... About Safety & Wellbeing

Over 1,200 respondents—or 57.9%—said that personal safety was “important to extremely important” in order to maintain women’s economic security. 22.9% percent of respondents stated that the Commission should focus on safer, more supportive communities to make Maine a better place for women and girls. “Dealing with sexual and/or relationship violence” was selected as the third-biggest challenge facing Maine’s younger (under 18) girls, behind “Making safe and healthy lifestyle choices” and “Pursuing educational opportunities.”

Many survey participants noted that sexual and relationship violence against women and girls is underreported. Despite the fact that data shows that exposure to violence happens across

“Growing amounts of child abuse and domestic violence are very serious problems in Maine and definitely need more attention since they are connected.”

—Survey Participant

women's lifespans, the focus of survey comments regarding violence was almost exclusively concerned with its effect on younger women (below retirement age). In fact, only 1.6% of respondents thought that personal safety and the threat of violence was the biggest challenge facing Maine's older women. Conversely, all survey respondents identified dating/relationship violence as the third greatest challenge for Maine girls under 18, and respondents 18 and under identified dating/relationship violence as the second greatest challenge. One respondent requested *"positive, supportive education on healthy relationships and how to read the signs of an abusive or manipulative relationship. Perhaps this ties into sex-ed, but if we start empowering and educat[ing] our girls early and encouraging them to seek out healthy, reciprocal relationships, we could help them be better prepared to avoid the pain and suffering of feeling trapped or stuck in unhealthy relationships."* It's also worth noting that taking the opportunity to teach boys about healthy, reciprocal relationships is important as well. Maine girls may also face bullying and peer pressure on a daily basis, which can negatively affect their well-being. Respondents under 18 identified "Dealing with peer pressure/bullying" as their greatest challenge.

Survey participants also identified the need for accessible legal services for individuals in violent situations. Additionally, respondents wrote that Maine is lacking enough safe outlets for women to access following abuse. When asked what the focus should be on to help women and girls, one survey respondent wrote: *"Available information on how to escape from abusive situations and/or relationships. Make some of the state's shelters more well-known to all citizens."*

The wellbeing of Maine women also is partially dependent on safe, adequate housing. More than 35% of respondents said that the Commission should focus on affordable, quality housing in order to make Maine better for women and girls. Additionally, more than 1,400 said that affordable housing is *important-to-extremely important* for maintaining women's economic security.

Overall, survey responses echoed the available data: domestic and sexual violence and sexual harassment and gender-based bullying are still issues faced by Maine women that impact their safety and wellbeing. In order to improve opportunities for women and girls, we need to change the underlying social norms that allow a culture of violence against women and girls (and boys and men) to exist.

"We need to talk about rape culture/sexual objectification of women. It's real, and right now it's having a devastating impact on girls and women of all ages. Why do I feel 'grateful' for never having been raped? Shouldn't that be a baseline expectation? Why do I feel grateful for never having been abused domestically? ...And, given the lack of these personal experiences, why do I still feel like it's my responsibility to watch out for my safety instead of having an expectation of being safe?"

–Survey Participant

DIMENSION 5: LEADERSHIP & PUBLIC LIFE

Women's participation in public life and in particular, leadership roles, is an important indicator of their overall status and wellbeing. A society equally governed by women provides fairer representation of its diverse communities and members, and a more balanced perspective for policy and rule making. Civic leadership opportunities provide girls and women with an important avenue for accomplishing equality in social status and economic stability.

We found little readily available statewide data that would measure the impact of women's leadership in the private sector, or in larger institutions such as hospitals and universities, economic development agencies, or even in local public government agencies such as school boards, town councils or select boards. While anecdotal evidence suggests Maine women are moving into leadership roles as CEOs, Presidents and board members, national data would indicate there is likely room to expand women's leadership at all levels. Just 4.8% of Fortune 500 companies, for example, are led by women—a minute figure which represents an all-time high for the list.¹⁰²



Maine has a rich history of women's participation in leadership and public life, and takes credit for a number of national 'firsts' in this arena. Margaret Chase Smith was the first woman in the country to be elected to both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. Maine's former U.S. Senator Olympia Snowe was the first woman in the United States to be elected to both state legislative chambers and serve as a member of both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate. And upon her election as State Senate President, Elizabeth Mitchell became the first woman in the country to have served as both Speaker of the State House and President of the State Senate. However, Maine continues to face challenges engaging girls in paths that lead to public leadership roles. To further this goal Maine must foster girls' interest in public life so as to sustain it into adulthood, as a means of ensuring women are equally represented in top decision making roles.

In 2015, women represent half of Maine's Congressional Delegation (Senator Susan Collins, and Representative Chellie Pingree). Chief Justice Leigh Saufley is the first woman to oversee Maine's Supreme Judicial Court, and Attorney General Janet Mills is the first woman to hold that post. Yet, despite these important achievements, Maine has fallen short in other areas. The State has yet to elect a female Governor, and while the State ranks in the top 15 nationwide for the percentage of women serving in the State Legislature, the bar is quite low. In 2015, women only make up 29% of the State's legislature, a number that has remained largely unchanged for a decade.¹⁰³ None of Maine's five largest cities with elected mayors has a female mayor. Among County Commissioners, who are elected officials responsible for fiscal operations and policy decisions, only 26% are female. As of 2014, Maine also had only one female sheriff and four female district attorneys.

Percentage of Women in Maine's Legislature ¹⁰⁴ (by year elected)		
Legislative Session	% Women in Legislature	State Ranking
127 th Legislature 2014	29%	Unavailable
126 th Legislature 2012	29.60%	11 th
125 th Legislature 2010	29%	13 th
124 th Legislature 2008	29.6%	10 th
123 rd Legislature 2006	30.6%	23 rd
122 nd Legislature 2004	23.1%	18 th
121 st Legislature 2002	26.9%	8 th
120 th Legislature 2000	30.1%	12 th
119 th Legislature 1998	27.4%	14 th
118 th Legislature 1996	25.5%	12 th
117 th Legislature 1994	27.3%	6 th
116 th Legislature 1992	31.7%	3 rd
115 th Legislature 1990	32.8%	3 rd
114 th Legislature 1988	31.2%	2 nd

Maine Women Speak... About Leadership and Public Life

Almost uniformly, survey participants believe in the importance of supporting leadership and community engagement opportunities for women and girls. 87.8% of survey participants answered “yes” when asked if such support was important. When asked to describe the type of support Maine should offer women and girls, responses were varied. Many survey participants reiterated issues that have been

“Supporting leadership and community involvement opportunities will open up more doors for women in Maine. It will give younger girls something to aspire to as well.”

—Survey Participant

discussed previously – health, education, economic security, and safety. One respondent wrote: *“If you would focus on paid maternity leave, “affordable quality childcare” becomes much less of an issue. Women should be able to stay home with their babies rather than farming them out to low-paid childcare workers, without losing their jobs or incomes.”* Others, however, discussed the need for broader civic education and leadership development, so that girls would know how to communicate with their local and state representatives. *“Women need to be valued as community leaders. We need more women serving on boards, in government, owning and managing organizations, and being recognized for our contributions,”* wrote one respondent.

Survey results mirrored data that suggests that younger girls are actively engaged in their communities, while older teen girls slowly pull away from that type of involvement. Many people noted that community

engagement activities should be available in schools. Multiple respondents suggested that there be the opportunity for older women to mentor girls, to show them how to become strong leaders in their communities and the workplace. *“Maybe [provide] assertiveness/negotiation training?”* wrote one participant, *“Something that teaches women to ask for what they want and deserve, that it’s okay to set appropriate boundaries.”*

Not only did survey results indicate the importance of supporting leadership opportunities for women and girls, but also it showed that the majority of respondents do not feel heard by those in governmental leadership positions. 36.8% of respondents report that they do not feel heard by their local officials, legislators, and other civic leaders. 28.4% said that they did feel heard, while 34.87% said they were unsure.

Comments corresponding with this section of the survey were mixed. Numerous respondents said that they felt heard at the local level, but not the state level. Some answers indicated that they knew that they probably could be heard, but do not put forth enough effort. Others said that they felt like there was an effort to hear and respond – on all governmental levels. A large majority of text responses indicated that partisanship has a negative impact on the responsiveness of elected officials, with one respondent commenting: *“The ‘party affiliation’ is more important to the present holder of political office than the needs of the constituents/community.”*

Of note, many comments highlight sexual discrimination or a feeling of gender inferiority that affects the ability to be heard by government. Multiple people said that while they feel heard generally, they do not feel like their ideas and concerns surrounding women’s issues are being seriously considered. Many who have voiced

their opinions regarding women’s issues feel ignored due to cuts in programs that benefit Maine women and girls. *“I feel very disrespected on a daily basis by the state government,”* wrote a survey participant. *“Issues relating to women and girls only receive attention when they threaten to portray Maine in a negative light regionally or nationally--such as when we’re in the middle of a string of disturbingly violent domestic assaults. Then, some words get said and everything quiets down. It shouldn’t take a murder to get people to pay attention to the [domestic*



violence] situation in Maine.” Another respondent commented: *“The good ole’ boy network is alive and active in Maine.”* These responses reflect women’s lack of confidence - due to gender bias - in our public institutions.

Overall, survey respondents see a need for more opportunities for women leaders in Maine, and believe that increased female leadership would not only benefit women, but also communities and the state as a whole.

ADDITIONAL ISSUES IDENTIFIED BY THE COMMISSION

In crafting the 2014 survey, the Commission identified broad areas that impact the lives of Maine women and girls. Respondents highlighted additional issues not specifically addressed by the survey that are worth noting.

Multiple respondents indicated that culturally competent services for Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender (LGBT) people are difficult to come by. One respondent wrote: *“LGBT women need support in all sectors. Every health and economic indicator is worse for non-heterosexual women and especially trans-women. Health care providers need to understand and be supportive of needs; families, schools, and communities need to be better prepared to offer support.”*



Additionally, many respondents noted the need for increased media literacy for young girls, with one respondent asking: *“Not just Maine girls, but girls in our whole country, seem to feel their role is to be sexy, not to be self-supporting, to rely on men. How can we empower more girls to aspire to be smart, self-sufficient, self-confident?”* Another wrote: *“The culture is saturated w/ sexually oriented messages indicating that women have to be sexually accepted to be valued, in a relationship, or ‘hip.’ Particularly w/ the younger generation women should be encouraged and affirmed for their independence and interior beauty and value.”* The Commission will take these comments into consideration when crafting questions for future surveys.

CONCLUSION

The data available through national, state and local resources, including our grassroots survey, paints a nuanced picture of what life is like for women and girls in Maine. It shows that Maine has strong neighborhoods and a sense of community, and that there are many who live well and prosper throughout the state. However, there are many difficulties inherent to living in a rural state that affect residents’ quality of life, at all stages.

The Maine women and girls who responded to the grassroots survey clearly described those challenges. They indicated concern for older women living in isolated areas, with no car, no in-state children/family, limited public transportation, and limited income; for single mothers who are living in poverty because family obligations prevent full-time employment; and for parents who cannot find quality, affordable childcare and thus cannot pursue certain jobs, educational activities, or leadership positions. The respondents were also concerned about young Mainers who cannot afford health care, and older Mainers who cannot access it. They indicate that although Maine is an attractive place to live, its citizens need more than is currently available to fully achieve economic success.

When discussions of public policy are so often fraught and contentious, our Commission members have come together from different ends of the political spectrum to reach consensus around our best ideas about how to move forward. The Commission is grateful to all those who contributed to this process, and we look forward to working with the Governor and members of the Legislature on worthwhile initiatives to improve the lives of women and girls in this state for generations to come.



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