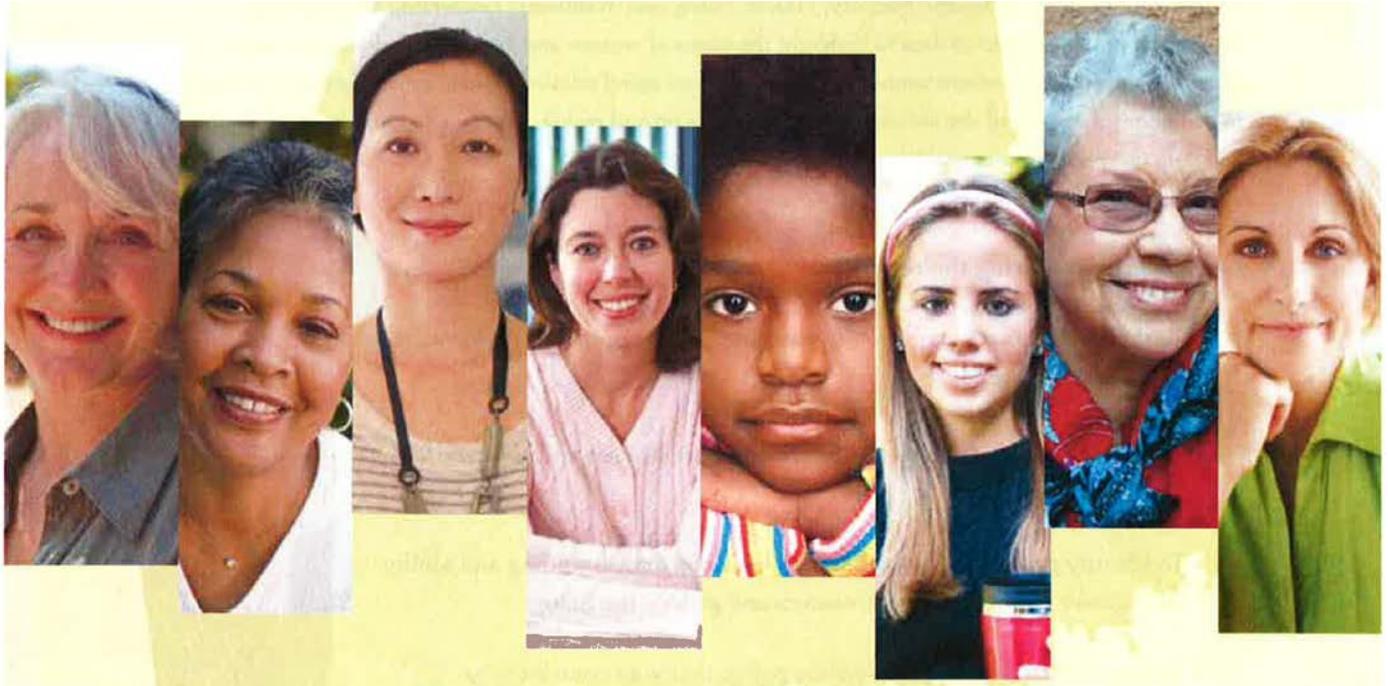


Survey Results

Voices of Maine Women and Girls



Survey Conducted by the
Permanent Commission on the Status of Women
With the Assistance of Katherine Power,
University of Maine Law School MAPIL Fellow
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ANALYZING SURVEY RESULTS

The Permanent Commission on the Status of Women was established by the Maine Legislature as 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 to 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 how women and girls are faring in the State;*
- **Activities.** *Promoting and coordinating activities on state and local levels designed to meet the problems of women in the State;*
- **Advocate.** *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 January 2013, the Commission completed its first biennial report to the Governor and the Legislature. The report, “The Status of Women and Girls in Maine,” examined five dimensions that contribute to the quality of life and opportunity for women and girls: Education; Economic Security; Health; Safety and Well-being; Leadership and Public Life. The Commission believes this report defines areas that impact opportunities for women and girls to succeed in Maine. The *report* also incorporates data on how women and girls are faring in the state.

Standing alone, the *report* presents 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 enhance their lives.

To collect this information, the Commission developed a survey loosely based on the 5 dimensions of the biennial report. All questions in the *survey* were written by members of the Commission – men and women that have knowledge of problems facing women and girls in the State, who have experience in advocacy relating to women's issues and who provide leadership in programs or activities that improve opportunities for women and girls.

The Commission is an unfunded advisory board. Thus, the distribution of the survey was, exclusively, a grassroots outreach effort by the Commission members. 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 web site from July 17 through August 10, 2012. A limited number of additional surveys were collected in November, 2012. The survey link and hard copies were sent to non-profit organizations, governmental advocacy groups, businesses, community outreach services, and individuals statewide. Hardcopies were printed and hand-distributed to populations without ready access to computers. 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 1,200 respondents completed the survey, with each county represented. Respondents included citizens of all ages, income levels, political viewpoints, and life experiences.

The *survey*, though crafted over months of deliberation, was not designed to be a scientific resource but used to get a more thorough (and personal) understanding of the statistics compiled in the Commission *report*. 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.

It is the hope of the Commission that paired together, the *survey* results and the biennial *report* will create a valuable tool in determining how Maine women and girls are advancing, and how we as a state might improve their opportunities and ultimately the overall well being of this great state.

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 1,200 survey responses from Maine residents. Demographic data regarding respondents revealed the following information.

Age of respondents:

- **1.6%** of respondents were under 18 years of age (20.3% of Maine's total population is represented in this category, according to the 2010 Census.¹)
- **6.5%** were between 18 and 24 (the U.S. Census' corresponding age category is for persons between 20 and 24, thus there is no benchmark for this data set.)
- **19.8%** were between 25 and 34 (compared to 10.9%)
- **15.5%** were between 35 and 44 (compared to 12.6%)

¹ United States. Census Bureau. State and County Quick Facts, Maine: 2010. Web. January 2013.
<http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>.

- **24.7%** were between 45 and 54 (compared to 16.2%)
- **23.6%** were between 55 and 64 (compared to 15%)
- **7.1%** were between 65 and 74 (compared to 8.8%)
- **1%** were over 75 (compared to 7.5%)
- **0.2%** did not indicate their age

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, 16.5% of Maine residents were 65 or older. Thus, the percentage of survey responses received from the elderly might not be fully representative.²

Race/ethnicity of respondents:

- **90%** identified as white or Caucasian (compared to 95.4% of Maine's total population, as reported by the 2010 US Census.³)
- **0.7%** identified as Hispanic (compared to 1.4%)
- **1.4%** identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native (compared to 0.7%)
- **0.7%** identified as Asian (compared to 1.1%)
- **1.7%** identified as Black or African American (compared to 1.3%)
- **2.6%** identified as “other”
- **3%** refused to answer

It is the Commission’s hope that in future surveys, we obtain more responses from all demographic groups.

Employment, Residence & Income:

- 0.5% of respondents had full-time employment 13.3% had part-time employment
- 6.8% were self employed
- 4.8% were not employed but looking for work
- 1.1% were unemployed and not looking for work
- The remaining 13.5% were either unable to work due to disability, students, homemakers, retired, or indicated “other.”

The survey also asked respondents in which county they were employed. All counties were represented in survey results; however, the majority of respondents (30.5%) indicated that Cumberland was the county of their employment. Waldo was the county in which the least number of respondents indicated they were employed (0.9%).

The above data coincides with information regarding respondents' residence. 34.5% indicated they lived in Cumberland county (slightly higher than the amount working in Cumberland, but

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

relatively parallel). The three counties with the next highest number of respondent residents were: Kennebec (12.5%), Penobscot (7.1%), and Washington (6.2%). The three counties with the least amount of respondent residents were: Lincoln (2.5%), Waldo, (2.4%), and Piscataquis (1.4%). 12.5% of total respondents indicated membership in a labor union. Of this percentage, 81.1% were employed full-time, 12.3% were employed part-time, and the remaining percentage indicated they were “retired/other.”

Moreover, 13.3% of respondents employed full-time in Maine are also members of labor unions. (11.6% of Maine's total population is represented in this category, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.⁴)

Additionally, respondents indicated the **approximate amount of their total household incomes (compared to the Maine household median income of \$50,502)**⁵:

- 9.5% had household incomes of less than \$15,000
- 24.3% had household incomes between \$15,000 and \$40,000
- 32.3% had household incomes between \$40,000 and \$75,000
- 27.7% had household incomes of more than \$75,000
- 5.2% of respondents did not answer

Educational Achievement:

- 1.1% had no schooling completed
- 2.8% had either no schooling or some high school, but no diploma
- 19.1% had a high school diploma and/or some college credit but no degree
- 7.5% had an Associate's degree
- 35.1% had a Bachelor's degree
- 34.4.% had a Master's, Professional, or Doctoral degree

The survey respondents represent a slightly higher percent of individuals with college degrees (77%) than the population as a whole. (72% of residents age 25 and above earned an Associates, Bachelors, or higher degree.)

Survey responses: Analyzing the results

The survey included both open and closed-ended questions, in addition to demographic information. The Commission evaluated the survey results in the framework of the biennial

⁴ United States Department of Labor. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Union Membership in New England, 2011. Web. January 2013. <http://www.bls.gov/ro1/neum.pdf>.

⁵ United States. Census Bureau. State and County Quick Facts, Maine: 2010. Web. January 2013. <http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk>

report, comparing common themes and identifying areas of difference.

Dimension 1: Education

“Education . . . everyone should be able to pursue a college education. EVERYONE should be supported to stay in High School, and to move forward . . .”

The primary conclusions reached by the biennial report (hereafter “*the report*”) found that too few Maine girls were reading at an age-appropriate proficiency level; that almost 10% of Maine women do not have a high school diploma, and that Maine women trend towards education that prepares them for traditionally female-dominated occupations, which are generally lower-paying.

Survey answers seem to indicate that Maine women find other issues more challenging than educational barriers, such as access to health care and lack of livable-wage jobs. Responses also suggest, however, that Maine women believe that to overcome the more challenging issues, educational opportunities must be present and accessible.

Respondents were asked to identify the biggest challenge facing Maine women. Only 2.4% of the answers indicated that access to post-secondary education was the largest obstacle for Maine women and girls, citing access to healthcare, lack of livable-wage jobs, and access to quality childcare as the three greatest challenges. Nevertheless, this does not signify that Maine women believe education is unimportant. To the contrary, almost 80% of respondents have a higher education degree.

Moreover, more than 50% of respondents found that “educational opportunities” should be a primary focus of the Commission, suggesting that a majority of respondents believe education is vital. Additionally, more than 83.4% of respondents said that “access to quality schools” was an “important to extremely important” element for Maine women’s economic security; opposed to 2.3 percent of respondents who said it was not. 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* and *survey* provide a glimpse of education’s role as it pertains to Maine women and girls. While post-secondary education is undoubtedly important, the predominant concern is access to – and completion of - quality elementary and high school education for Maine girls. The *report* found that few 4th grade girls are reading at the required proficiency level and that a tenth of Maine girls do not graduate high school. The *survey* results showed that education and access to quality schools (though not specifically post-secondary education) is considered valuable to improving the lives of Maine women and girls, and is an area on which the Commission should focus its efforts.

Dimension 2: Economic Security

“With our high poverty rates and the persistent wage gap for Maine women, I am deeply concerned about an accelerated poverty rate for future female seniors. Updating our labor policies is an important step in improving women’s earning power – such as paid sick days, paid

family medical leave, and others. When women can stay in the workforce and transition more seamlessly between care giving responsibilities and workplace responsibilities, there are fewer earning gaps that add up to less contributed to social security, retirement plans, etc. . .”

Economic security is largely defined as having access to a variety of resources sufficient to meet one's basic needs for clothing, housing, food, and health care. As the **report** discussed, there are many factors involved in building true economic security. These include but are not limited to: education, job security, actual wages, family composition, and lifespan.

The **report** found that Maine women face many obstacles to economic security, especially later in life. Maine women typically live longer, make less money than their male counterparts, and often have decreased financial resources as they age. **Survey** results aligned with the report's conclusions, and highlighted additional challenges facing Maine's elderly female population.

Economic Security Issues Affecting Maine's Elderly Women

“Maine is a rural state with limited access to transportation, the oldest housing stock in the country and very cold winters. Current support programs based on the federal poverty level don't account for geographic differences, or for how much heating fuel is needed for a winter . . . add these issues to the fact that women tend to outlive men and you have a grim picture. Cold, isolated women in homes that they cannot keep up...”

The lack of economic security for Maine's elderly women often begins prior to retirement. Dozens 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. 36.6% of survey respondents believe that by 2020, the economic security of elderly Maine women will be considerably worse than other states; 32.7% believe that it will at least be “a little worse” than other states. Only 3.5% of respondents believe that the economic security of Maine's elderly women will be better than other states.

Common themes regarding the poor financial outlook ran throughout respondents' observations.

Most prevalent were concerns that many of Maine's elderly live in rural areas that have limited, if any, public transportation. Lack of transportation becomes a serious issue when the elderly 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 elderly women in rural areas not only subjects them to social isolation, but also limits their access to health care, potential employment, and fresh food.

When asked what challenge facing Maine's elderly population was of most concern, 39.2% of all respondents found it to be lack of adequate income. Moreover, 40.3% of elderly respondents between the ages of 65 and 74 said that the greatest challenge facing their age group is lack of adequate income.

The next greatest challenge facing elderly Maine women, according to 19% of respondents, is lack of access to quality health care – another important factor in overall economic security.

“Many elderly women in Maine,” wrote one participant, *“are now and will be living on fixed incomes with little money left over for medications, heating, and food.”* Another respondent wrote: *“Most [elderly women] in Maine have outlived their partners and have raised their children, who have now moved to another state to make money . . . and they are losing their homes because they aren’t able to pay the high taxes. It comes down to paying for health care, heat, and food, or paying taxes.”*

Not all those surveyed, however, felt that the situation of elderly women in Maine was quite so bleak. Without citing specific community supports, many respondents indicated that the community-oriented attitude of Mainers helps support elderly who may be struggling. Wrote one survey participant: *“Our people are amazingly conservative and used to making do. We have amazing MaineCare and Medicare and other programs. Women stick together and support each other. . .”*

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

Economic Security Issues Affecting the Economic Security of Maine’s Younger Women

“We won’t achieve real prosperity until those with the least access to the basics are raised up in one way or another. Maine will not be successful again with so many women and children remaining in poverty.”

Many of the economic challenges faced by elderly 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. *“So many women leave Maine after high school because . . . they feel they have “done everything” by the time they leave . . . and after college, there are very few exciting job opportunities in Maine,”* 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. The **report** found that 30% of women leading single-parent households are living below the federal poverty line, and 60% of single-mother households with children under five are living in poverty. It is likely that due to poverty, these households are lacking in the components of economic security highlighted by the **survey**. Moreover, 96.3% of respondents said that affordable housing is important-to-extremely important for maintaining women’s economic security.

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: *“I really wish that when [my children] were school-age that*

someone had advocated for better childcare options . . . it nearly wrecked me, and our family.” Another participant wrote: *“As a full time mom who has just left my marriage, the issues facing single and separated-co-parenting mothers are on my mind. For a while I nearly didn’t leave because I wasn’t sure how I would make things work financially, practically without my husband’s income and health insurance.”*

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, said one respondent.* Maine needs to recognize, respondents said, that women deserve equal pay, a safe environment in which to live, access to healthcare, education, childcare, leadership opportunities and transportation – and more. *“All of the [issues that create barriers to Maine women] are crucial to the well-being of women and girls,”* wrote one respondent. Another echoed the sentiment: *“All of these things are so critical, it’s nearly impossible to prioritize.”*

Dimension 3: Health

“In order to obtain services – health care services – women have to live in urban areas (public transportation in rural Maine is terrible) but affordable housing is non-existence in cities. . . I am fortunate that I am healthy enough to work. I don’t know what I will do if I have a serious health challenge.”

The health of Maine women, as indicated in the **report**, is vital to their ability to support themselves, their families, and can affect their community participation and their ability to lead full and happy lives.

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 elderly women, and almost half (43.3%) of respondents identifying as refugee/immigrant said it is the biggest. Respondents identified health care as the number one issue the Commission should focus on to make Maine better for women and girls. Additionally, 20.5% of respondents indicated that the greatest challenge facing Maine girls (under 18) was access to sexual education and reproductive healthcare.

Throughout the survey, people repeatedly emphasized that access to health care in all forms was essential to the betterment of Maine communities. *“Health care,”* one participant wrote, *“must include reproductive health services, access to mental health care and support for families of mentally ill as well as home health care and respite for elderly folks and their caretakers.”*

What’s more, it is clear from the **survey** that people feel there is a shortage of these services – both in their availability and accessibility. Frequently echoed were the need for reproductive health care and education for both women and girls, and the need for mental health and substance abuse services.

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. “*Substance use and abuse remain a grave concern,*” wrote one respondent, “*and the age of initial use is lowering. We need to reach our youth sooner. . .we lack resources and community youth activities that impact teens’ progression into adulthood.*” Similarly, another respondent wrote: “*As a middle school health teacher I see more kids dealing with mental health issues like depression and anxiety than I should . . . And kid[s] are harming themselves as a way to manage these strong emotions.*” According to survey participants, “*making safe and healthy lifestyle choices*” is the biggest challenge facing Maine’s under 18 population.

When asked about the need for healthy food choices, more than 90% of respondents said that access to healthy food was important to extremely important for a woman’s economic security, and only 0.3% said it was not important at all. Several respondents mentioned that programs educating Maine women and girls regarding these issues would be beneficial and 24.3% of respondents said that the Commission should focus on access to healthy food in order to make Maine a better place for women and girls. “*[There are issues with] obesity and overweight females,*” wrote one respondent. “*We need more health gyms and programs.*”

Dimension 4: Safety and Well-being

Maine, as stated in the *report*, is regularly ranked as one of the safest states in the country. This fact, however, does not mean violence in Maine is non-existent. An estimated 62,000 women in Maine will seek medical care related directly to interpersonal violence over the course of their lives – and 81% of women who experience violence by an intimate partner reported significant short or long term impacts.

Survey results underscore the *report’s* statistics. “*Violence against women,*” wrote one respondent, “*significantly impacts a variety of health indicators and indicators of well-being.*” Almost 60% of respondents said that personal safety was important to extremely important in order to maintain women’s economic security. 22.5% 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 second-biggest challenge facing Maine’s younger (under 18) girls.

Many survey participants expressed the opinion that there is more sexual and domestic violence towards women and girls than is reported. This sentiment aligns with report data, which found that only 2/3 of domestic violence crimes are reported to the police. “*Sexual assault and exploitation is a very real concern in this state, yet our state is seen as “safe” and “rural” so these are not pressing issues to most people – they should be! It is unacceptable at any level,*” wrote one survey participant.

The focus of survey comments regarding violence were 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 elderly women. Less than 2% of participants over the age of 64 indicated they felt it was the biggest

challenge facing elderly women. Wrote one respondent: *“Young girls are vulnerable, and can be easy targets for predators . . . early prevention via education, more safe schools, faster care, and safer activities are needed.”* Maine girls can also face bullying and peer pressure on a daily basis, which can negatively affect their well-being. Survey respondents identified bullying/peer pressure as the third greatest challenge for Maine girls under 18, and 46.7% of respondents under 18 said that “making safe and healthy lifestyle choices” was 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. *“I still think that it is hard for young girls and women to reach out in crisis situations,”* one person wrote. *“Whether someone has been emotionally, physically, or sexually abused, it’s sometimes hard for young women to come forward, even when they have loving and supportive families. Sometimes it’s really hard to be brave.”*

Overall, survey responses echoed the findings of the report: sexual violence, domestic violence, and bullying are still issues faced by Maine women and girls that affect their safety and well-being. In order to improve opportunities for women and girls, they must be rectified. As stated by one respondent: *“It’s pretty hard to be a successful person if violence or the threat of violence is a daily reality.”*

Dimension 5: Leadership and Public Life

“I love the legislative leadership shown by many [women] now and in the past . . .but we need more women elected to office - especially on the local, selectmen level.”

Almost uniformly, survey participants believe in the importance of supporting leadership and community engagement opportunities for women and girls. Almost 90% of survey participants answered “yes” when asked if such support was important, and only 2.2% answered in the negative. (The remaining percentage was unsure or did not answer.)

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 discussed previously – health, education, economic security, safety. Others, however, discussed the need for broader civic education so girls would know how to communicate with their local and state representatives. *“Women and young girls should be taught how to contact and engage their leaders,”* wrote one respondent, *“so that whether they are actively involved in politics or not, they will have the ability to affect change.”*

Survey results mirrored **report** data in 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. *“There are*

leadership opportunities to be had,” wrote one participant, “but many women don’t know about them, or have the confidence or skills to pursue them.”

Not only did *survey* results indicate the importance of supporting leadership opportunities for women and girls, but also it showed that the many respondents do not feel heard by those in governmental leadership positions. 41.8% of respondents report that they do not feel heard by their local officials, legislators, and other civic leaders. 28.7% said that they did feel heard, while 29.5% said they were unsure. It is of note that of those participants identifying as refugees/immigrants, the majority - 63.9% - said they do not feel heard by the local or state government. Only 13.9% feel heard, while the remaining 22.2% were unsure. Respondents cited language barriers and system barriers as reasons for feeling unheard, as well as a sense of apathy from the government regarding the immigrant and refugee population.

Other comments corresponding with this section of the survey were mixed. Numerous respondents said that they felt heard at the local, 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. *“I am especially pleased with local officials and their attempts to hear and respond to women,”* wrote one respondent. *“I think state representatives are trying, but not always successful.”*

Many remarks 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. *“On a personal level, yes, I make my voice heard, participate in the process and get in the way of legislators,”* wrote a survey participant. But *“with gender issues, I believe women are largely ignored.”* Another respondent commented: *“I think women’s concerns are still not heard by those in charge, both men and women.”* 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 female leadership would not only benefit women, but also communities and the state as a whole.

Conclusion and What We Learned

Survey participants have provided a more nuanced picture of what life is like for women and girls in Maine. This picture shows that Maine has strong neighborhoods and a sense of community, and that there are many who live well and prosper throughout the state. On the flip side, however, the survey illustrates the difficulties of living in a rural state, and the challenges that affect quality of life, at all stages of life.

The women and girls who responded to the survey show concern for elderly women living in isolated areas, with no car, no in-state children, limited public transportation, and limited income; for single mothers who are living in poverty because family obligations prevent full-time employment; for parents who cannot find quality, affordable childcare and thus cannot

pursue certain jobs, activities, or leadership positions. They also are concerned about young Mainers who cannot afford health care, and elderly Mainers who cannot access it. Mainers are concerned about violence that still exists in this state, and the lack of legal and counseling supports available to victims. They indicate that although Maine has so much to offer, its citizens need more than is currently available to fully achieve economic success.

What's more, this informal survey process highlighted potential benefits from a more structured, scientific survey by the Commission in the coming years. Current participants highlighted many issues not addressed by the survey, and many responses suggested questions be designed to more clearly to address other aspects of women's lives.

For example:

- More than 30% of respondents said that the Commission should focus on affordable, quality housing in order to make Maine better for women and girls. Additionally, 67.3% of participants said that affordable housing is important-to-extremely important for maintaining women's economic security, and 22.5% said that the Commission should focus on safer/more supportive communities to make Maine better for women and girls. However, this data is limited in its use because "safe housing" might be quantified in two separate ways: one being a structurally sound building with heat and electricity; the other being a household free of violence and abuse. Without a clearer definition, it is difficult for the Commission to formulate appropriate solutions.
- Many respondents who identified as members of a Native tribe or as refugees/immigrants indicated they felt unheard by the state government. Another survey might address this issue by enquiring if people have the knowledge and ability to contact the state government, or if there are other communication obstacles of which the Commission is unaware.
- Several participants wrote about their concern for marriage equality and equal rights for gay and lesbian couples. This survey was distributed prior to the passing of Question One, and future surveys might ask participants if the new legislation is alleviating their concerns or if more needs to be done.
- Future surveys might also address concerns of grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. Several participants wrote there was a lack of support for this type of situation, and highlighted the lack of childcare for children with special needs.

Moving forward, the Commission will use the information from the survey as its framework for policy recommendations and advocacy positions, as well as a starting-point for future statewide surveys. Combined with the report, the Commission feels equipped with a more accurate understanding of the issues that impact the lives of Maine women and girls.

The Commission is grateful to all those who contributed to this understanding: Commission members, supporters, and all of the survey participants. We look forward to working with

Governor LePage and members of the Legislature on worthwhile initiatives to improve the lives of women and girls in this state for generations to come.