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Op-Ed: Working Together with the MA Caucus of Women Legislators

By: Senator Joan B. Lovely and Representative Hannah Kane

The 19th Amendment, granting women the right to vote and hold office, was ratified in 1920. Just three years later, Massachusetts [elected](#) the first two women to the legislature. 100 years later, [234](#) women have served in the Massachusetts General Court--compared to over 20,000 men.

Today, women make up 31% of the Massachusetts legislature, and the [62 women](#) who serve are all members of the [Massachusetts Caucus of Women Legislators](#). Since our 1975 founding, our membership has grown in size and diversity, and our areas of focus have expanded—and we have maintained a consistent thread of support among members.

While still a minority of the legislature, our members are a force to be reckoned with. They hold a variety of [leadership titles](#) and serve as leaders on policies ranging from energy to health care. Women are in an unprecedented five of the six constitutional offices, including Governor Maura Healey and Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll.

We are honored to be co-chairing the Women's Caucus for the 2023-2024 legislative session. Supported by a [12-member Board of Directors](#), the Caucus aims to harness the power of its members and advance issues that impact women.

The Caucus' [strategic priorities](#) for this session include elevating women's economic opportunity and eliminating barriers, addressing racial and gender disparities in health care, and empowering women in government. [Legislatively](#), the Caucus is focusing on five priorities that span these important areas.

Under the economic topic, the Caucus is supporting two bills. Reps. Fluker Oakley and Cutler and Sen. Jehlen filed *An Act relative to salary range transparency*, which would have MA join several states in requiring employers to disclose the salary range when advertising a position. Research has found that salary range transparency in the hiring process is one of the best tools to help close the gender wage gap. *An Act relative to a livable wage for human service workers*, filed by Rep. Khan and Sen. Friedman, addresses disparities between the rate of pay for human services workers employed directly by the state and those employed by agencies with state

contracts. Human services workers are more likely to have lower median wages and lower household incomes than workers in other industries.

To address racial and gender disparities in health care, Reps. Barber and Livingstone and Sen. Jehlen have filed *an Act to increase access to disposable menstrual products in prisons, homeless shelters, and public schools*. This bill requires all schools, prisons, and homeless shelters to provide free access to menstrual products, which are a basic hygiene need and should be accessible to all. *An Act relative to postpartum depression screening*, filed by Rep. Fiola and Sen. Friedman, also aims to address health disparities. Postpartum depression is vastly underdiagnosed, partly because women are not being screened enough. This bill would require MassHealth to provide coverage for postpartum depression screenings by pediatricians for 12 months. Women often do not come forward with their symptoms, so having a pediatric physician who is trained to spot them can be critical.

Empowering women in government has long been a priority for the Caucus, and we support *An Act supporting parents running for public office*, filed by Reps. Meschino and Connolly and Sen. Jehlen. Currently, childcare costs incurred during campaign events and activities are considered personal expenses and therefore not eligible for reimbursement. This bill would allow state and local candidates to use their campaign funds to pay for campaign-related childcare expenses. Doing so would eliminate a major barrier and advance equitable political representation throughout the Commonwealth.

Bipartisan and bicameral in nature, the Caucus is a unique entity on Beacon Hill, bringing together all the women who serve. The Caucus' membership spans generations, geography, backgrounds, cultures, and political views. That diversity is what keeps the Caucus strong. We come together on issues that impact all women, using our members' lived experiences to ensure that the generations of women to come have expanded opportunities.

We encourage you to [connect](#) with the Caucus, support our priorities, and consider how you can get involved in your community. With all of us working together, we can continue to make strides toward true equality.