

Testimony prepared for Maine Human Rights Commission hearings of 11/20/74

My name is Lois Reckitt and I am State Coordinator for the National Organization for Women in Maine with chapters in Kennebunk, Portland, Augusta, Wiscasset-area, Bangor, Houlton and Presque Isle (and soon, Lewiston-Auburn). NOW is a civil rights organization of men and women actively working to bring women into the mainstream of American society and not infrequently to change ~~the~~ mainstream.

Two of the major goals of our organization since its inception have been the vigorous enforcement of equal employment opportunities and the amendment of the Civil Rights Act (Title II) to include prohibition of sex discrimination in public facilities. In this latter area it is gratifying to see Maine lead the nation.

In the area of employment we see a need in Maine for the following:

- 1) enforcement of the EEOC guidelines on newspaper advertising.

Although most, if not all, newspapers in the state have stopped the practice of help wanted - male and female columns (after pressure from NOW and other groups such as the

Portland Women's Rights Union) an informal survey of just one copy of the Portland Evening Express revealed 34 ads which were discriminatory under EEOC guidelines. Sexist ads discourage women from seeking jobs where they are apparently not wanted. It is a rare woman indeed who would answer any ad which said " Man wanted for .....".

2) the encouragement of the formation of Talent Banks not just for state government but for private industry. Perhaps the MHRC could encourage just such a development within the present structure of the Maine State Employment Service.

3) the vigorous enforcement of your age discrimination provisions which disproportionately affect women who both live longer than men and are frequently absent from the labor market for some time only to find it near to impossible to return to meaningful employment.

4) a close look at the system of veterans' preference in civil service employment should be warranted on the basis of the near total exclusion ( until only recently) of women from the military service

5) a close monitoring of the affect of the current economic situation that may tempt employers to use layoffs to eliminate affirmative action and retaliate against those who press for equal rights. Rather, we would ask the MHRC to aid employers in the development and implementation for affirmative action programs which may help to remedy the effects of past discrimination against women.

Lastly -

6) we see a need for educating all women to know their employment rights and assisting them in filing complaints as well as organizing where they work. In this and any other area we would be happy to assist the MHRC in the performance of their responsibilities.

The area of credit discrimination is a major area of concern to our membership, particularly in the Northern parts of our state. The MHRC might help in this area by encouraging women to protest denial of credit if they suspect unfair discrimination and by publishing information on how to fight back. It also might be

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helpful to publish information on credit discrimination to educate the community at large. Credit is an area of particular concern not just to women in general, but in particular our sisters on AFDC grants who would wish to be judged on their individual merits as creditors and not semi-automatically denied credit because of the AFDC "label" they bear.

I thank the Commission for its time.