



Eastern Mass Chapter Newsletter

The Voice of Midlife and Older Women

Next meeting, Sept. 28, 2006

Vol. 1, No. 3: September-October, 2006

In This Issue

[A Legacy for Our Daughters and Granddaughters](#)

[The Strong Families Act: Paid Leave for Every Worker in Massachusetts](#)

[Legislative Update/Miscellaneous](#)

[Calendar](#)

[Stay in Touch with OWL](#)

From the Chair

Dear OWL members,

I hope you all had a healthy, relaxing summer. Mine was full of family and friends, which is always a treat.

This Fall we have a lot to do. As is often said, this is a time of challenge and opportunity. Two of the bills we supported passed the Massachusetts legislature in 2006, the Massachusetts Health Care Reform Bill and the Equal Choice bill. Both are important for women, but how they are implemented will be something we need to watch carefully. The Health Care Reform bill has the potential to help women in their 50s and early 60s who lose health insurance due to divorce and death or retirement of a spouse. (For more information: <http://www.hcfa.ma.org/act/>) The Equal Choice bill will help older disabled women in need of long-term care. Two of the bills we supported did not pass: the equity in annuities bill and the paid sick leave bill. They will be on agenda for the coming legislative session.

This Fall is also an election year, with a Massachusetts gubernatorial race as well as federal and state legislative races. An election year is a good time to raise policy issues important to midlife and older women. We will be discussing how to make caregiving and income security topics of the election discussions and welcome your ideas.

On the education front, Kim Johnson and I attended several meetings to help develop a training for women in public policy. The curriculum will be part of the ABZs of Women in Public Policy offered by the Public Policy Institute this fall, which Eastern Mass OWL is participating in. We will also be planning some speakers for our meetings this fall. Knowledge is power!

Finally, if your membership is paid up you should have received an election ballot for the National OWL board. There was a problem with the ballots



sent to members in the Northeast, so you will be receiving a new ballot shortly. Please remember to vote in that election as well as the November election.

Be Well,
Ellen

- **A Legacy for Our Daughters and Granddaughters**

At an April 13, 2006, OWL-sponsored event, Evelyn Murphy, former Massachusetts lieutenant governor, spoke to an enthusiastic audience at the University of Massachusetts Boston about the gender-earning gap and what can be done about it. She cited some alarming statistics. Women still earn less than men, \$0.77 for every dollar. For Black/African American women it is \$0.70, and for Hispanic/Latino women it is \$0.58 for every dollar. The cumulative lifetime disadvantage of this wage gap amounts to \$700,000 less for a female high school graduate compared to a male high school graduate, \$1.2 million for a college-educated woman, and \$2 million for a woman in the professions. This gap has remained stagnant over the last ten years and has been compounded by other persisting job inequities experienced by women. These include fewer women being hired for the best-paid positions and fewer being placed on the promotion track, and higher numbers of women experiencing sexual harassment and stereotyping.

Murphy, with a PhD in economics, years of experience in the world of politics, and countless stories of individual women's work experiences, says that women need to "get smart, get organized, act." She recommends that we start "talking about money with each other." She adds, "It's more difficult for employers to discriminate if women are knowledgeable about who gets paid what." She has encouraged the formation of grassroots "wage clubs" starting in Portland, Maine, and throughout New England and the country (http://www.wag_eproject.org). Not only must women be knowledgeable, but we need to learn to negotiate like men, on men's terms. However, she stresses that men can be allies. The issue often is family income and the family budget. It is an issue about all family members. Evelyn Murphy's recent book *Getting Even: Why Women Don't Get Paid Like Men and What to Do About It*, is available at local bookstores. Pick up a copy for a deeper understanding of her argument for wage equity and her strategies for obtaining it.

- **The Strong Families Act: Paid Leave for Every Worker in Massachusetts**

Joan Ditzion, LICSW

On June 8, 2006, hundreds attended a spirited hearing of testimony regarding the Strong Families Act: Paid Family and Medical Leave, Senate bill no. 2353, in the Gardner auditorium of the State House. This groundbreaking bill was filed by Senator Robert E. Travaglini and several Senate co-sponsors, including Senators Karen E. Splika and Thomas M. McGee, chairs respectively of the Children and Family Committee and Labor and Workforce Development Committee. The hearing took place before these joint committees.

The bill would give all state employees 12 weeks of paid medical leave annually, compensated at 100% of their pay up to \$750 a week and including job protections. A worker could use the leave to recover from an illness or injury or to care for a spouse, parents, or children, including a newborn, newly adopted child, or a new foster infant. The leave was to be financed with a mandatory payroll tax averaging \$2.50 per week, with minimum wage earners paying less than \$1.50 per week.

A majority of those at the hearing testified in support of Senator Travaglini's bill, which if passed would have provided the most generous paid leave in the U.S. By way of comparison, California's law offers 55% of a paycheck for six weeks with a cap at \$840 per week. The National Family Medical Leave Act, passed in 1993, allows 12 weeks of unpaid leave for employees working in companies of 50 or more. Only 60% of workers are eligible and 64% of those eligible cannot afford to take it.

I was delighted to testify on behalf of OWL, which is a member of the Paid Sick Leave Coalition and one of many coalitions testifying in support of the bill. The bill certainly provided visibility for OWL's agenda to help working caregivers who find themselves in the 'Club Sandwich' generation between two, three, and sometimes four generations, all at times needing care, while simultaneously working full- or part-time to make ends meet. OWL's 2006 Mother's Day Report, *Women and Long-term Care: Where Will I Live and Who Will Take Care of Me?* focuses on long-term care and women's pivotal role and the steep price they pay for their efforts in terms of reduced wages, job security, and retirement security. This bill would have supported women engaged in work/family balancing so that they would not have to choose between caring for themselves and family members or their jobs.

Update: Unfortunately, since the bill was introduced late in the legislative session, there was not time to gather sufficient support from House members of the Committees. However, the Senate members of the Committees and Senate President Travaglini have indicated strong support for the measure. This fall, the Paid Leave Coalition will

confer to determine strategies for a new Paid Family and Medical Leave and Paid Sick Leave bill for the next legislative session.

- **Legislative Update/Miscellaneous**

The MassHealth rules for calculating the resources available to the spouse of a nursing home resident have changed. Effective July 1, 2006 a spouse living in the community is entitled to keep up to \$99,540 as her share of countable family assets. Under the former rules, a spouse was entitled to keep all of the assets up to \$19,998 or half of the assets up to \$99,540, whichever was greater.

- **Calendar**

September 28, 2006 – The Eastern Mass OWL Chapter will meet from 12 Noon to 1:30 p.m. at UMass Boston, Gerontology Department, 3rd floor of the Wheatley building. Call 671-287-7300 or -7305 for directions.

October 21, 2006 Our sister chapter, Greater Boston OWL will be holding their General Meeting on Saturday, October 21st, at 1:30 p.m. at 100 Centre Street, Brookline MA. A panel of experts will address the topic Housing and Long-Term Care: Where Will I Live and Who Will Care for Me?

October 21, 2006 The Multicultural Coalition on Aging will conduct a multilingual conference, Aging Well Together: Our Health Is In Our Hands, on Saturday, October 21, 2006, 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Tufts Health Plan, 705 Mt. Auburn Street, Watertown MA. This program focuses on health and wellness for diverse elders in need of access to health information and health resources.

January 25, 2007 (4th Thursday) Elder Caucus Meeting, State House.

- **Stay in Touch with OWL**

- National OWL, <http://www.owl-national.org/>
- Eastern Mass OWL, info@massowl.org