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Frances Perkins (c. 1935), photo courtesy of the Frances Perkins Center

Dr. Alane O'Connor and the late Frances Perkins to be inducted into Maine Women's Hall of Fame in March

The 2026 inductees to the Maine Women's Hall of Fame will be Dr. Alane O'Connor, Director of Perinatal Addiction Medicine at MaineHealth Maine Medical Center who has been in the forefront of addiction medicine in the state, and the late Frances Perkins, U.S. Secretary of Labor under President Franklin Roosevelt and architect of New Deal programs that Americans rely on today.

The honorees will be inducted in a ceremony on March 21 at the University of Maine at Augusta during Women's History Month. The public event begins with a reception at 1 p.m., followed by the induction ceremony at 2 p.m. To attend, RSVP by March 15 to mainewomenshalloffame@gmail.com. Snow date is March 22.

This is the 36th [Maine Women's Hall of Fame](#) Induction Ceremony to honor those who have made outstanding contributions to improving opportunities for all Maine women. Organizations and individuals nominate outstanding women whose achievements have made a significant statewide impact and improved the lives of women in Maine, and whose contributions have enduring value for women. Inductees are selected by an independent panel of judges.

O'Connor, an innovative, compassionate, purpose-driven leader in addiction medicine, was born and raised in rural Maine. She earned an undergraduate degree at Colby College, a master's from Boston College and doctorate from Vanderbilt University. In 2005, she returned to Maine as the opioid epidemic was intensifying. She began caring for patients with substance use disorder as part of her rural family practice and later became board certified in addiction medicine.

O'Connor was one of the first providers in Maine to serve pregnant women with substance use disorders. She became the state's leading expert and served as the

medical director of the Maine Maternal Opioid Misuse (Maine MOM) initiative, a five-year, \$5 million federal grant to expand access to substance use treatment for pregnant and postpartum women. She is the first Director of Perinatal Addiction Medicine at MaineHealth Maine Medical Center and is core faculty in Maine's only addiction medicine fellowship.

O'Connor has trained hundreds of physicians, including both residents and fellows, and published more than a dozen peer-reviewed manuscripts on maternal and infant outcomes following treatment with medication for opioid use disorder during pregnancy, as well as related postpartum healthcare utilization and health policy.

Recognizing that some of her most at-risk pregnant women were not accessing health care in traditional settings, she developed a partnership with Portland Fire Department to create Project Lifeline, a nationally innovative medical and community paramedicine program that delivers street medicine services to unhoused pregnant and postpartum women with substance use disorder who live in tents, shelters, vehicles, and on the street.

Beyond caring for pregnant women, O'Connor works in the correctional system as the Director of Addiction Medicine at Somerset County Jail and Franklin County Detention Center, and is the clinical advisor to the Maine Sheriffs' Association. In this capacity, she developed and implemented a nationally innovative program using a monthly injectable medication (rather than a daily pill) to treat incarcerated individuals with opioid use disorder. The outcomes, published in *Health & Justice*, showed that the injectable medication expanded access to treatment during incarceration, improved treatment continuation after release and reduced the risk of post-release drug overdose death. The project gained nationwide attention and was featured on the front page of the *New York Times* and a related podcast. Her current research on reproductive life experiences of incarcerated women with substance use disorder blends both health fields.

O'Connor lectures regionally and nationally on substance use disorder to a variety of audiences, including medical providers, the child welfare system, the correctional system and judiciary, and law enforcement. She is a member of the Maine Maternal Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Panel and co-chairs Maine's Opioid Response Clinical Advisory Committee, which advises the state's opioid response director on clinical and public policy issues. Throughout her career, she has dedicated herself to serving the most marginalized individuals with empathy and compassion, and believes that human-centered and innovative strategies empower vulnerable individuals to thrive.

Perkins, the first woman to serve on a presidential cabinet (1933–45), was a social worker, public servant and trailblazer who championed workers' rights. She is best

known as the architect of many of the New Deal programs that protected workers, helped the country recover from the Great Depression, and created the modern middle class: Social Security, unemployment and workers' compensation insurances, minimum wages, maximum work hours, bans on child labor, health and safety reforms, and more.

The Perkins family settled in Newcastle, Maine in the mid-1700s. Fannie Coralie Perkins (she would later change her name to Frances) was born and raised in Massachusetts but returned to Maine each summer to spend time with her grandmother, Cynthia Otis Perkins, who she said was the most influential person in her life. The picturesque 57-acre family homestead remained a place of respite and reflection throughout Perkins' busy career and later years. She inherited the property in 1927, owned it until her death in 1965, and was buried alongside her husband in a nearby cemetery.

In 2014, the Frances Perkins Homestead was designated a National Historic Landmark, and in 2024, the Frances Perkins National Monument.

Perkins' education and early career took her first to Mount Holyoke College, then Illinois to teach at a girls' preparatory school and volunteer in settlement houses, and eventually to New York City, where she received a master's degree at Columbia University and lobbied for worker protection laws with the New York Consumers' League. In 1911, Perkins witnessed the horrific Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire that killed 146 people, consequently investigating similar tragedies and recommending new state fire safety practices. Perkins rose in New York State politics during the 1910s and 1920s, working closely with Gov. Al Smith and later serving as the inaugural New York State Industrial Commissioner for Gov. Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

In 1933, FDR asked Perkins to join his presidential cabinet as Secretary of Labor. Later, Perkins wrote a best-selling biography of FDR, was appointed to the U.S. Civil Service Commission, and lectured at Cornell University's School of Industrial Relations. Perkins' professional achievements were accomplished in addition to her personal responsibilities as a mother, wife, daughter, sister, grandmother, caregiver, parishioner, community member, and beloved friend to many.

Although her policy work happened elsewhere, Perkins' career continues to have a significant impact on Maine, especially the one-quarter of Mainers who receive Social Security (more than half of whom are women). Perkins knowingly paved the way for other women in politics and public service, strategically navigating the male-dominated government at every step of her career.

Of her decision to become Secretary of Labor, she later reflected: "The door might not be opened to a woman again for a long, long time, and I had a kind of duty to other women to walk in and sit down on the chair that was offered."

Perkins and O'Connor will join an impressive list of inductees to the Maine Women's Hall of Fame that include authors, athletes, artists, activists, administrators, political and religious leaders, educators, doctors, lawyers, scientists and college presidents. Among the most recent honorees: physician Julia McDonald, community activist Nancy Fritz and astronaut Jessica Meir. A full list of inductees, starting with Sen. Margaret Chase Smith and women's health advocate Mabel Wadsworth in 1990, is [online](#).

[Business and Professional Women/Maine Futurama Foundation](#) established the Maine Women's Hall of Fame. [The Bennett D. Katz Library at the University of Maine at Augusta](#) has a collection of photographs, video recordings and other materials from the Maine Women's Hall of Fame induction ceremonies, as well as a permanent public gallery of inductee portraits. The portraits of O'Connor and Perkins will be hung in the library immediately following the March 21 induction ceremony.

BPW/Maine Futurama Foundation, working with Maine Community Foundation, awards [annual scholarships](#) to outstanding and deserving Maine women to help them achieve economic self-sufficiency.