



Elder Abuse Institute of Maine

Testimony of Kathryn Harnish on Behalf of the Elder Abuse Institute of Maine

To Joint Standing Committee On Appropriations and Financial Affairs

In favor of LD 258: An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Appropriations & Financial Affairs and Health & Human Services committees, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of the Governor's 2023-2025 biennial budget as it pertains to appropriations to the Department of Health & Human Services. My name is Kathryn Harnish, and I am the Data and Communications Specialist for the Elder Abuse Institute of Maine, on behalf of which I am testifying today. The Elder Abuse Institute of Maine is a statewide organization committed to ensuring that all older Maine people impacted by abuse have access to the resources, services, and support they need to live the lives they choose. Toward this end, my agency designs, delivers, and evaluates elder abuse prevention, detection, and intervention programs that have become, in conjunction with the work of our partners in the Adult Protective Services unit, a critical part of Maine's aging services landscape.

I am grateful to see the ways in which the Governor's budget responds to the [recommendations of the Elder Justice Coordinating Partnership](#), allocating \$4M to bolster Adult Protective Services' work as "first responders" in addressing situations of abuse; expand resources for civil legal services to protect the rights of older adults; and make permanent Maine's innovative Elder Service Connections (ESC) Program. Together, these investments will strengthen safeguards in place for Maine's older adults, [one in ten](#) of whom will experience some form of abuse, neglect, or exploitation, and ensure that the state is well-prepared for the rapid growth in residents aged 60 or older.

Since 2019, the Elder Service Connections Program, a cross-sector partnership between Maine's APS organization and the nonprofit Elder Abuse Institute of Maine, has been working with older

adults across Maine to ensure that critical needs are met in a way that honors their wishes and promotes their well-being. In an environment of overburdened systems of care, our program provides older adults and their families with wraparound services that help to meet their longer term goals and needs. Where APS caseworkers focus on the immediate safety needs of an older person, a referral to the ESC program allows an Advocate to develop deep relationships and meaningful change with clients, important steps in our evidence-based intervention model. Working collaboratively with clients and their supporters, our Advocates strengthen family and social supports and help to mitigate the risk factors faced by these individuals. In fact, [research shows that the ESC program effectively reduces repeated referrals](#), lessening the burden on APS and allowing them to serve more clients.

The people we support through ESC are our neighbors – the 83-year-old man in Oxford County whose worsening dementia causes him to wander at night; the older couple in York County whose retirement savings have been gutted by a child’s misappropriation, leaving them at risk of foreclosure; the 79-year-old Aroostook County woman who was physically assaulted by a caregiver and no longer trusts anyone to come into her home to assist with personal care. These examples represent just a few of the stories that more than 400 clients to date have shared with our Advocates, underscoring the fact that elder abuse doesn’t manifest in just one way or affect only “other people.”

It’s also not uncommon for clients to tell us that the work we did in partnership with them “saved” their lives. To quote one client: “My Advocate came into my life at a time when things were very dark, and I didn’t think I deserved any help. But she stuck with me, and because she treated me with respect and dignity, I began to see myself and my opportunities very differently.” There truly are no better words to reinforce the importance of our work and the urgency for continued funding.

I’m thankful for Governor Mills’ vision and commitment to Maine’s older adults and your consideration of my testimony. I encourage you to advance the biennial budget before you with full funding for health aging programs, including the investments necessary to support those individuals who, like our clients, are at greatest risk.