

Written Testimony of Dr. Jeffrey Aalberg

In Support of LD 1684

An Act to Invest in the Health and Wellness of Older Maine Residents by Expanding Coordinated Community Programming

Submitted via Online Testimony Portal on May 1, 2023

Greetings Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. On behalf of older adults in Southern Maine, I am testifying in support of LD 1684.

My name is Jeff Aalberg and I am a family physician and currently the Medical Director of Day One. For 25 years I served as the primary physician for many patients, from young to old. I've held leadership positions at MaineHealth including CMO of the ACO and Senior Medical Director for Elder Care. I recently **completed** a decade-long tenure on the Board of Directors for Southern Maine Agency on Aging.

I am passionate about helping community-based organizations ensure better cognitive, physical, and emotional health for our citizens especially those with age-related needs – the young and the elderly. Case management for older adults is *lacking* in our system today and I have seen firsthand how much having an Agency on Aging social worker, or case manager, on the healthcare “team” can lead to better health outcomes.

Many Primary care docs support annual wellness visits and period check-ins on health. Although the office encounters are valuable, they can address only a fraction of the needs of many elderly citizens. Challenges persist with the aging population, including financial, transportation, rural living, food insecurity, health awareness and loneliness, to name a few. As we age, chronic conditions arise: diabetes, COPD, heart disease, dementia and poor mobility. Multiple medication management is difficult. There's simply not enough time to address these individual-specific needs in a 1:1 provider check-up visit. It would be a tremendous benefit to be able to easily refer an individual to an Area Agency on

Aging case management system, ensuring that an older adult will get access to the information, social and health services they need.

While MaineHealth Director for Elder Care I worked with Southern Maine Agency on Aging on a grant funded care transitions pilot. While the model was focused on patients being discharged from the hospital, the core components were the same as in the case management bill before you today - an Agency on Aging case manager works with an older adult to develop a comprehensive care plan that addresses their individual needs. They coordinate services like medical appointments, transportation, home health care, and social services, among others. By working with a case manager, older adults can stay healthy and connected in their own communities.

The pilot program **worked**. We were able to prevent hospitalizations and decrease the emergency room visits, which can be costly and disruptive for older adults and the healthcare system. The success was outlined in a peer-reviewed national publication.

In addition, Southern Maine Agency on Aging and MaineHealth partnered on an Alzheimer's grant. The grant demonstrated that, for individuals with mild to moderate dementia, a dedicated case manager ensured that each individual patient had their needs met.

These examples strongly underscore how a basic, and accessible, case management and navigation service can be a critical part of the healthcare system. Such a system is vital to ensuring our elder citizens can access and receive the necessary care to maintain their health and well-being. And it saves money.

Thank you for your consideration and support of LD 1684 today.