



**Testimony of Jena Jones on Behalf of
the Maine Council on Aging to the Committee on
Health and Human Services**

**In Favor of LD 1684 - An Act to Invest in the
Health and Wellness of Older Maine Residents by
Expanding Coordinated Community
Programming**

Delivered on May 1, 2023

Greetings, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and the members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services.

My name is Jena Jones, and I am the Director of Policy and Advocacy at the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of over 135 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older community members working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged, and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age at home and in community settings. I am testifying in favor of LD 1684.

Maine's Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) have been providing and connecting older adults and those with disabilities to necessary services and supports to assist them in maintaining dignity, autonomy, and choice for decades. They bring meals, provide family caregiver support, offer expert advice on insurance and drug benefits, and direct older Mainers to community resources. In many of Maine's more rural communities where resources are typically minimal, our AAAs are older Mainer's primary resource for connection to services and their communities.

Ensuring those connections are robust and well maintained requires significant investment in time, personnel, and programming – all of which are made more complex due to our persistent shortage of direct care workers and affordable housing. What used to take minutes or hours to make referrals to services is now taking weeks, sometimes months because of the complex nature of the challenges older adults are facing in Maine. While the AAAs receive a small amount of federal funding through the Older Americans Act to do complex case management, they cannot begin to meet current demand within existing funding.

Maine citizens deserve access to help and support in the spaces they call home, wherever that may be – and we know that help is needed now. At current funding levels, our AAAs are only able to serve about ¼ of adults over 60, yet we know that 1 in every 4 older Mainers lives alone (most of them older women), 1 in every 6 Mainers are threatened by food insecurity, and older adults 65+ represent the fastest growing homeless population in the country.¹ Maine's rural communities, those with traditionally fewer resources and community connections, are seeing an increase in median age, and some communities are now overwhelmingly populated by older adults. For instance, 60% of the homes in Millinocket and 71% of the homes in Eastport house

¹ (Kushel, 2020)

someone over 60 compared to an average of 45% statewide. When these people need access to resources, they call their local AAA. But, when no resources exist in their region, AAA staff have to help the older person triage a solution.

Case management services are already provided on a diagnostic basis for those with behavioral health challenges or intellectual disabilities, but we do not currently have the capacity to provide targeted case management services to older adults. LD 1684 provides two tracks of funding to equip our AAAs with the ability to provide this service. The initial \$2.5 million will allocate \$500,000 to each AAA for development of the infrastructure, staffing, training, and regional outreach necessary to provide case management services. In the second year, the bill provides on-going funding in the amount of \$2.5 million that will be allocated by the intrastate funding formula to allow each of Maine's AAAs the ability to provide on-going case management services.

Supporting LD 1684 is to support all older Mainers and those with disabilities who rely on the incredible services and supports offered by Maine's AAAs. We must ensure older adults have meaningful access to care and support services across our state. Until they do, and while they struggle to find affordable housing and the care they need, they must have access to experts who can help them navigate to safety net services and solutions. We urge you to support LD 1684 as it represents another solution toward correcting persistent challenges and ensuring all Mainers who need care and support receive it.

Thank you, I am happy to answer any questions.

Jena Jones