



**Testimony of Jena Jones on Behalf of
the Maine Council on Aging to the 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 for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30,
2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025**

Provided on May 17, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and the members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee.

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 258.

The Governor's Change Package represents an important investment in Maine's economy and its people. The Housing First Program, for example, will work to aid Maine's chronically homeless population. By the very definition, one can see that people who are chronically unhoused eventually grow old, and we've seen this trend so significantly in Maine that we've had to modify shelters to accommodate the changing needs of older people who are unhoused. Older adults also represent the fastest growing homeless population in the country.¹ Again, we're seeing this alarming trend here, with older people being unable to afford current housing nor find other affordable housing, or worse, becoming homeless because they cannot find home care or homemakers services because of our severe direct care workforce crisis.

We support these efforts, but also want to emphasize that many of these initiatives will take significant time to implement and do not address the current crisis facing older Mainers. In fact, there is nothing specifically in this change package focused on the urgent needs of older Mainers, many of whom are facing homelessness, cannot access or afford care, are waiting to receive home delivered meals, and will never have enough money to afford rising food, housing and homecare costs.

Despite years of efforts and resources, Maine's older adults are still struggling to meet their basic needs. Providers who offer care and support services continue to face financial insolvency secondary to a workforce crisis that was exacerbated by a multi-year pandemic. The systems of support that Maine people rely on have continued to erode and we see the consequences daily.

¹ Kushel, Margaret. Homelessness Among Older Adults: An Emerging Crisis, 2020.

We must do more, we have the financial resources available to do more, and we must act with the kind of urgency the situation demands. With resources readily available we need investments in affordable and equitable housing options and connection to community services to ensure older people have every means necessary to remain safely housed and active in their communities as they age.

Currently, the Change Package does nothing to directly address the needs of older Mainers. A bill that only addresses the needs of some but not others is not equitable public policy, nor does it ensure that we are lifted up in all stages of our lives. There are, however, other bills to be considered by this Committee that do address the supports and services that we will need as we age.

We urge the Committee to use LD 258 to fund LD 1684, a bill to fund critically needed case management services provided by Maine's area agencies on aging – they are the frontline workers who are trying to keep older people from becoming unhoused even when there is no housing available, and trying to find care for older people, even when there are no available care workers. This funding is urgently needed to help people now, not in the future.

We urge the Committee to use LD 258 as a vehicle to fund LD 1522, a bill to address systemic economic injustices that have left some older people in Maine significantly less well off financially than others. This bill lifts tens of thousands of older Mainers out of poverty by expanding eligibility for the Medicare Savings Program. This single act will reduce the number of older people likely to experience a life crisis and need other assistance. It will save us so much more in the long run and help people remain healthy, productive members of our communities and workforce.

Finally, we urge the Committee to use LD 258 to fund LD 1718, a bill that creates a tuition credit for direct care workers. According to a recently published report by the Maine Center for Economic Policy, the direct care workforce crisis is keeping more than 8,000 Mainers from employment due to the need to care for a loved one as too few direct care workers are available and it's costing us more than \$1 billion annually in lost economic activity.² LD 1718 is a bill that incentivizes people to join this workforce and remain in it for a period of time. It would increase and stabilize this workforce.

We support efforts to make child care more affordable through LD 258, and note there is no corresponding effort to make elder care services more affordable or available. LDs 1718 and 1522 are efforts to address accessibility and affordability of direct care services and should also be included in the change package.

You have the opportunity to craft solutions through the lens of age-equity as you do your work. Ask yourselves what population is left behind in funding recommendations and correct the inequities within this bill. It's hard to see what's not there, but we ask you to do just that.

Thank you, I am happy to answer any questions.

Jena Jones

² Phillips & Phillips. The High Cost of Undervaluing Direct Care Work. 2023.