



February 26, 2024

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and Member of the Appropriations and Financial Services Committee, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is John Hennessy and I have the honor of serving on the Board of Directors of Equality Maine. I am offering this testimony in opposition to Part NN of the Supplemental Budget.

Last year we testified in support of LD 1522 – An Act to Provide Economic Justice to Historically Disadvantaged Older Mainers in the HHS Committee. This bill would significantly increase eligibility for the Medicare Savings Program, a program funded by mostly federal dollars that helps older adults in Maine live healthy, independent, and with dignity.

The Health and Human Services Committee supported the proposal unanimously, the legislature agreed and included it in the biennial budget to become effective this week, March 1, 2024. The state inexplicably failed to implement these changes and now the Governor has proposed cutting this historic investment in Maine's older adult community.

It is estimated that 30,000 older adults in Maine, your constituents, will lose access to this life saving support. The increased eligibility in the Medicare Savings Program will cost Maine \$14 million and will bring \$38 million in federal funding to the state.

It is a fact that many older Maine women who live in your districts are twice more likely to live alone than men, and at least half of those women do not have enough annual income to meet their basic needs.

Health and wellbeing are the foundation of aging but some LGBTQ+ older adults have faced a lifetime of significant barriers. Equality Maine believes that access to Medicare should not be another barrier.

We know that other states, including Connecticut, Massachusetts, and the District of Columbia have implemented similar or higher increases to the Medicare Savings Program, and the federal government has approved those changes.

On behalf of the 30,000 older adults in Maine who would benefit from this program we ask you to reject this proposed cut and insist the Department of Health and Human Services take immediate action to implement it now.