

February 26, 2024

Greetings Senators Rotundo and Baldacci, Representatives Sachs and Meyer, and members of the Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services,

My name is Frank Brooks and I live in Portland. I am testifying against the proposed cuts in eligibility to the Medicare Savings Program as proposed in LD 2214, the Supplemental Budget. I was surprised and disappointed to learn that the Governor's proposed Supplemental Budget cuts the hard-fought fight for increase in MSP eligibility established by the legislature just last year.

The increases to eligibility that were incorporated into last year's Supplemental budget addressed lower-income older Maine residents' poverty rates by mandating paying for all or part of Medicare Part B premiums-adding up to 174.00/month (2088.00/year) income to vulnerable older adults budgets. We know that lower-income older adults in Maine already make difficult choices paying for uncovered healthcare expenses (including prescription drugs) or buying food, fuel oil, and other basic living needs.

As a social work educator, I taught social welfare policy courses to both undergraduate and graduate students. I told students to "follow the money", to understand that public spending reflected public priorities and that state and federal budgets were documented statements about which groups would benefit from public spending-and that programs to assist vulnerable and marginalized groups were often underfunded or not funded at all.

The expanded MSP is an anti-poverty program targeting some of Maine's most vulnerable older adults. These groups, who have often been relegated to low-wage jobs, are then penalized again by receiving lower Social Security benefits-since those benefits are based on lifetime earnings. These groups include older white women (TWICE as likely as older white men to live in poverty) older women of color (TWICE as likely to live in poverty as older white women), and older LGBTQ women and men who are more likely to live in poverty than heterosexual/cisgender older adults).

It is urgent that the Maine legislature reject the proposed cuts to MSP expansion so that vulnerable older Mainers can be lifted from poverty or near-poverty subsistence. The cost of the MSP expansion will be \$14 million-while drawing down \$38 million in federal funding. With a two-year budget estimated surplus of \$265 million-what a fortunate situation that is-we must support older Mainers in need by eliminating the language cutting MSP and implementing the expanded eligibility limits that this body has already approved and funded.

Sincerely,  
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Signed electronically 2.26.24