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Testimony of Joy Barresi Saucier, Executive Director, Aroostook Agency on Aging in Support of LD1684 and the Medicare Savings Program to the Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services Joint Standing Committee on LD 2214, HP 1420 An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024, and June 30, 2025.

Good morning, Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Appropriations & Financial Affairs Committee, and Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. I am Joy Barresi Saucier, Executive Director of the Aroostook Agency on Aging.

The purpose of my testimony is to request the 131st Legislature to consider including LD 1684 – An Act to Invest in the Health and Wellness of Older Maine Residents by Expanding Coordinated Community Programming in our state’s 2024 Supplemental Budget and to also stay true to the commitment made last session to expand eligibility for the Medicare Savings Program.

Our goal at the Aroostook Agency on Aging is to help older people age in their home and home communities. We know that this is best for them and for their communities.

As legislators representing older adults of Maine, I am reaching out today to ensure you are aware of the many challenges older Mainers are facing. Many have significant difficulty finding and maintaining access to affordable housing, accessing supportive services in the home, and barriers to staying connected to their communities. Because of this, they often need extensive supports.

As just one of the many examples,

An 86-year-old gentleman from the greater central Aroostook area was referred to us by his local credit union. The credit union recently visited his home as he was requesting a home improvement loan. Upon their visit, they saw that not only was he living in deplorable conditions in a 16x16’ home that was well beyond repair, but that his wife was incapacitated and lacking needed supports. This couple needed services and supports including alternative housing, home-based or residential long-term care, financial assistance, and a host of other supports. The Agency responded with an offer of information and assistance and other services, but this situation truly requires the assignment of a case manager that could assist intensively over the next weeks and months until his needs were met.

It may occur to you that this is the role of the Agency. We agree as we are the place to go for information and assistance, the provider of Meals on Wheels and caregiver support. With that said, we do not have funding to do this type of extensive case management. There is no true case management system for Older Mainers unless they have a specific issue such as mental health, HIV, etc.

While this story depicts just one of the many challenging situations faced, it is worth noting that we are also seeing a significant increase in requests for service. At the Agency, responses to requests for information and assistance are up 10% from 2020 and our partners at Legal Services for the Elderly have seen a 18% increase in hours from Aroostook County since 2020. Both these service areas are leading indicators of increasing complexity of needs in the community and the need for intensive case management.

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(Continued) **Testimony of Aroostook Agency on Aging in Support of Medicare Savings Program and LD1684** to the Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services Joint Standing Committee on LD 2214, HP 1420.

LD1684 works to address two of the most pressing crises facing older Mainers: access to stable, affordable housing and access to care and supportive in-home services. Funding our Area Agencies on Aging to provide targeted case management services for older adults, a service that does not currently exist for this demographic, is desperately needed.

Please support this bill by including it in the upcoming Supplemental Budget. We can keep our older adults safely at home and in their communities, which is where we would all like to age, but we need your leadership and support of LD 1684 to do so.

In addition, as you know, last year, the Maine Legislature took historic action to improve the economic security of older Mainers by significantly increasing eligibility for the Medicare Savings Program (MSP), a program funded mostly by federal dollars that reduces Medicare costs for qualifying participants. The Legislatures directed the State to implement new eligibility levels that would have ensured tens of thousands of older Mainers have enough money to meet their basic needs.

This became law and is in statute – the State has failed to implement it and now the Governors' Supplemental Budget proposes cuts to the plan in part NN. About 30,000 older Mainers will lose access to this new benefit as a result.

Other states, including Connecticut, Massachusetts and the District of Columbia have implemented similar increases to the MSP, and the federal government has approved those increases. In fact, Maine's increase almost mirrors those in Connecticut.

My understanding is that while the increased eligibility for Medicare Savings Program costs Maine about \$14 million, it brings \$38 million in federal dollars to our state economy. This program also helps keep older Mainers healthy and save us all money.

Please consider this information and take any action within your ability to stay true to the expansion of eligibility to the Medicare Savings Program that the Legislature committed to in the last session.

I appreciate your support as we work together to continue to meet the needs of older adults living independently in the great State of Maine.

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