

Testimony of Diane Bertrand, *Retired* Family Caregiver Specialist of Spectrum Generations, the Central Maine Area Agency on Aging

To Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services 132nd Maine Legislature, First Regular Session

In Favor of LD 709 (if amended) – An Act to Establish the Respite for ME Program; and

In Favor of LD 815 – An Act to Provide Funding for Respite Care and Supplemental Services Provided by the Family Caregiver Support Program

Honorable Senate Chair Henry Ingwersen and Honorable House Chair Michelle Meyer and all other Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services Committee,

I am Diane Bertrand, Retired Family Caregiver Specialist of Spectrum Generations, the Central Maine Area Agency on Aging.

Background:

Thank you for allowing me to tell you my story, I worked at Spectrum Generations as a Family Caregiver Specialist from December 2021 until my recent retirement in January of 2025.

I began my work on section 68, and we had around 25-35 consumers, the program at the time had asset limits and a need for a physical diagnosis letter that stated a diagnosis of Alzheimer's or Dementia as well as a 20% copay.

Most Caregivers that reach out to our state Area Agencies on Aging for the first time are extremely stressed, tired and at the end of their rope; in short, they are completely burnt out. The Respite for ME Grant allowed us to not only provide them with relief by listening to their story but also by providing financial assistance for the significant day-to-day costs of keeping your loved one at home.

I had the pleasure of being one of the Family Caregiver Specialists that got to work on the Respite for ME grant for fiscal years 2023 and 2024. This grant had no income limits, no physical diagnosis and the expanded covered services really assisted our much stressed and overworked caregivers.

The expanded covered services such as indoor and outdoor chores that included snow plowing and sanding slippery driveways and walkways as well as lawn care for consumers that needed to spend more time caring for their loved ones, was invaluable. As well as

consumable supplies for incontinence and the much overlooked and needed forms of self-care for caregivers included counseling and physical fitness classes. The Respite for ME grant also covered dental services. Dental care is directly correlated to one's overall health and our caregivers being as healthy as they possibly can is part of what keeps their loved ones at home longer.

With Respite for ME Grant, and its broad list of covered services, no need for Alzheimer's or dementia diagnosis, no asset limits and no co-pay, we were able to provide much needed financial assistance and stress relief to over 200 Caregivers. By the time we finished Caregiver enrollments, which often included, tears being shed, and reassurance being given, you could hear the hope and relief in each person's voice. Being able to provide people with the opportunity to find hope and relief was my favorite part of my job.

The only downfall to Respite for ME was that caregivers struggled with finding the words required to complete the attestation form which was a necessary document for the Respite for ME program, often deterring potential caregivers from accessing services. This form required consumers to state how the Covid 19 Pandemic affected them financially.

It is my hope that the funding for this program is brought back, with the same criteria minus the attestation form so that all Area Agencies on Aging can continue to provide financial and emotional relief for those who are ineligible for the State Respite Care program due to its drastic eligibility requirements and shortened covered service list.

I will always have a deep love for Caregivers as I too was a caregiver to those in need during my youth. It is of vital importance to continue to support our family caregivers with adequately funded and easily accessible programming. Family caregivers are invaluable to our society and should be treated as such.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Diane Bertrand

