



Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Testimony in Support of L.D. 709, *An Act to Establish the Respite for ME Program* and L.D. 815,
*An Act to Provide Funding for Respite Care and Supplemental Services Provided by the Family
Caregiver Support Program*

By Heide Lester on behalf of EqualityMaine

March 14, 2025

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Heide Lester, and I am the Deputy Director of EqualityMaine, which has been advocating on behalf of Maine's LGBTQ+ community since 1984. We support the restructuring and rebranding of respite care through L.D. 709 and providing necessary funding via L.D. 815.

In Maine, which has the highest median age in the country, a high percentage of people identify as LGBTQ+ compared to other states; there are approximately 19,000 LGBTQ+ adults in Maine aged 50 and older, 7,000 of whom are 65 and older.¹ Despite recent gains in protections for the LGBTQ+ community, older adults have lifetimes of discrimination that have left them more likely to experience social, financial, physical, and mental health disparities, and at higher risk for developing chronic diseases, living in poverty, and experiencing social isolation.²

87% of Mainers aged 45 and older prefer to age in place.³ However, LGBTQ+ older adults are four times less likely to have children and twice as likely to be single as their non-LGBTQ+ peers. They may also be estranged from their biological or legal family members if those people do not accept their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. In the absence of people to rely on from their families of origin, LGBTQ+ people have a long history of creating chosen families, typically made up of friends, partners, ex-partners, and perhaps some relatives. Therefore, as an LGBTQ+ person ages they may turn to their chosen family to help with their social, physical, and emotional well-being. In fact, it is common for the majority of an LGBTQ+ older adult's close friends and chosen family to be older adults themselves, which means that many older LGBTQ+ people rely on one another, and a large number find themselves becoming caregivers.⁴ One in five LGBTQ+ people is providing care for another adult, compared to one

¹ "Adult LGBT Population in the United States." *The Williams Institute, UCLA*, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/LGBT-Adult-US-Pop-Dec-2023.pdf>

² Fredriksen-Goldsen, Karen I, et al. "Health Disparities among Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Older Adults: Results from a Population-Based Study." *American Journal of Public Health*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3770805/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC3770805/).

³ "Family Caregivers in Maine Provide 2.9 Billion in Unpaid Care to Loved Ones." *Maine*, 17 Oct. 2024, states.aarp.org/maine/valuing-invaluable-report.

⁴ "Caregiving in the LGBT Community." *SAGE*, sageusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/sageusa-successful-lgbt-caregiving-education-guide-longterm-care.pdf.

in six non-LGBTQ+ people.⁵ LGBTQ+ older adults caring for their LGBTQ+ peers “experience compounded health disparities, and many have the added stress of knowing that there is no one else to care for their loved one should they need to relinquish their caregiving duties.”⁶

The act of providing physical, emotional, and perhaps financial support to an ill or aging person can lead to isolation, stress, and eventually caregiver burnout. It is therefore critically important to provide caregivers with the support they need: respite care allows caregivers to have temporary relief and may help them ultimately maintain their role as primary caregivers for a longer period of time.⁷ The proposed investment in caregivers, who are the foundation of our long-term care system, is also fiscally smart as it will reduce the strain on public benefits and the broader healthcare system.

We urge you to vote “Ought to Pass” on L.D. 709 and L.D. 815. Please ensure that families of all kinds receive the support they need and deserve.

Thank you,

Heide Lester (they/them)

⁵ “Caregiving in the LGBTQ+ Community,” *Family Caregivers Online*, familycaregiversonline.net/caregiver-education/caregiving-in-the-lgbtq-community/.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Min, Aehong, et al. “Can I Take a Break? Facilitating In-Home Respite Care for Family Caregivers of Older Adults.” *AMIA ... Annual Symposium Proceedings*. *AMIA Symposium*, U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2021, [pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8075491/](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8075491/).