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LD 814

My name is Christine Szalay and I am writing to support the passage of LD814/HP0521 which will provide funding for Maine's Area Agencies on Aging. I have had extensive contact with Spectrum Generations in the Lincoln County area as well as Bath/Brunswick and was on their local advisory council for a few years. I worked for and am retired from a non-profit partner agency, Catholic Charities SEARCH, matching volunteers with isolated and mostly low income older adults. Many of the clients I served would have been completely malnourished were it not for Meals on Wheels. The program is a lifeline not only for nutrition, but for companionship. Many of my clients did not see another human being from one end of the week to another except for their Meals on Wheels driver.

I frequently referred to, and even drove clients to appointments with, Aging and Disabilities Resource Counselors, who were instrumental in finding further resources for people who were in need of support services. Many times it was difficult to make an appointment because the one counselor was split between two offices which cover a vast geographic area. It is also difficult for many homebound older adults to access an office. For a short time a few years ago there was funding to provide home visits with a counselor to provide options and referrals for the assistance these clients needed. More funding would help with this challenge.

As I myself was getting set to retire, I attended a free Medicare 101 session at my local Spectrum Generations Office. Once I retired and needed to choose my Medicare plan, I was able to meet one-on-one with the Aging and Disabilities Resource Counselor and find the best plan for my needs. Most people do not realize that this help is offered for free and either scramble to figure it out themselves or go to a private insurance agent, often choosing plans that do not adequately serve their medical needs which in turn can cost them dearly. Again, funding for more counselors, as well as educating the public about availability of these services, is sorely needed.

I urge you to pass this bill to provide funding to upgrade services for older adults in our oldest state.