

Testimony in Support of LD814 AN ACT TO PROVIDE FUNDING TO AREA AGENCIES  
ON AGING FOR COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES AND PROGRAMS TO SUPPORT  
OLDER ADULTS

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Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Carol Higgins Taylor and I live in Bangor. Thank you for the work you all do to represent Mainers from across the state. And thank you, Representative Cloutier and the co-sponsors of LD814 for bringing this vital legislation forward.

I am the vice president of the board of directors of Eastern Area Agency on Aging which serves residents of Penobscot, Piscataquis, Hancock and Washington counties. More than a board member, I am a former employee having spent 14 years (2000-2014) as the communications director, before resigning to start my own PR firm. I did remain a part of the agency on a contract basis prior to becoming a board member.

I am also the host of the long-running radio show, Senior Talk with Carol Higgins Taylor, on WVOM 103.9 and 101.3.

I have spent many years, and gone down many avenues, seeking the stories of how older adults in Maine are living. Because of my work, and Senior Talk, I am contacted by older adults on a regular basis looking for help, with everything from being unable to afford heat and food, to problems with Medicare or caring for an ill spouse or other loved one. I immediately refer them to EAAA.

The stories of the challenges these individuals face daily have kept me up at night more than once. They are often desperate, out of options (seemingly) and feeling like they have nowhere to turn, and while that may sound dramatic, I assure you it is not. It is reality. I have listened to their tears, frustration, fear, and anger.

I write this testimony in strong support of LD814 *An Act to Provide Funding to Area Agencies on Aging for Community-Based Services and Programs to Support Older Adults*. I will refer to this as the *Older Mainers Act*, sponsored by Representative Cloutier.

The Older Mainers Act is crucial for the well-being, and in some cases the survival, of some older Mainers. Good nutrition is a basic need, a basic right. Yet, there are aged

individuals who do not have enough to eat. I think about an old man I knew who essentially lived on cereal and soup, trying to make that stretch as far as possible...until he began receiving Meals on Wheels. He was also diabetic so his health was in significant decline because poor nutrition was taking its toll.

Meals on Wheels is quite literally a life-saving, and money-saving service, yet currently more than 600 older Mainers are on waiting lists for these services. How do you tell an elderly man that there is no money to help him, to feed him, after he has worked hard his whole life contributing to his community and society. The Older Mainers Act would allow for more than 335,000 additional meals to be provided across the state. It prevents older adults from going to bed hungry.

Meals on Wheels also helps keep people out of very expensive long-term care facilities. Poor nutrition can quickly lead to very poor health. It is a very narrow gap between malnutrition and a nursing home. The Older Mainers Act promotes independence and keeps older adults *out* of facilities because it provides hands-on, wraparound case management services. It is a safety net allowing older adults the dignity they so richly deserve.

I remember a story of an elderly couple who dragged their mattress to the kitchen in the winter and sat in front of the oven for heat. EAAA helped by getting them the services, including a heat source, that they needed.

Another woman didn't have water in her home because her pipes had frozen. She lived that way for weeks until she finally got up the courage to tell someone. EAAA got her help.

A very frail gentleman I had the privilege of visiting required oxygen around the clock. He was painfully thin. He told me to took him an hour, an actual hour, to make a sandwich because his lungs were so diminished and his energy was so low that he couldn't do the task all at one time. He'd need to stop and rest. Because of that, he often didn't eat. Imagine how life changing the Meals on Wheels program was to him. I think of him sometimes when I sit down to a perfectly cooked steak at a fine restaurant with friends.

The stories are heartbreaking but unfortunately not unique. Without this critical funding, there will be many more stories like these. Looking into the eyes of an elderly person who is feeling defeated and forgotten, changes you. These people deserve better.

As a former employee and now a board member/volunteer/talk show host/elder advocate, I have seen firsthand the positive impact that these services have on our elderly population, a population that worked hard, raised families, in some cases fought in wars for this country.

My own uncle and grandmother benefited from EAAA programs, including Meals on Wheels. My cousin benefitted from caregiver services as she navigated caring for her parents, one with advanced heart disease and the other with dementia. It is terrifying to think of what would have happened to my own family, and other elders that I have known personally, or have had contact with, had it not been for the services provided by EAAA.

Telling their stories as communications director for 14 years was an honor, though some of the stories have haunted me and stayed with me. And now as a board member, I can still, hopefully, provide help and hope.

Supporting the Older Mainers Act is not just an investment in the health and resiliency of our elderly citizens - though it is - it is also the right, the humane, thing to do. It is the only thing that matters. It ensures that every older Mainer has access to essential benefits, community, and services, and can stay in their home if they choose, can have a nutritious meal on their stomachs, and that caregivers receive the support they need so they can have a minute to at least breath.

I urge you to support the Older Mainers Act and help us continue to provide these vital services to our older residents. Doing so will improve the lives of older adults and their families in Maine for generations to come.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and commitment to bettering the lives of Mainers.

Sincerely,

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