

Testimony in Support of LD 814: Addressing the Senior Care Crisis in Maine

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LD 814

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Stephen Braverman and I have been a Board Member with the Southern Maine Agency on Aging for 7 years. Thank you for your service to the state of Maine and its people. I live in Wells, Maine and I am testifying to highlight the urgent need for LD 814, a bill that addresses the growing care crisis for older Mainers. Our state has the oldest population in the country, and with this distinction comes significant challenges. The costs for in-home care and nursing homes in Maine are among the highest in the nation, placing a heavy burden on our seniors and their families. While state funding has increased in the last 5 years, the increased needs and the rapidly growing population have outpaced those increases.

An overview of the challenges facing Maine:

Over the past decade, Maine has seen a troubling trend: a 19% decrease in nursing homes and a 21% reduction in patients served. This strain on our system is palpable, with at least 26 nursing homes closing their doors in the last ten years. Currently, there are only 79 nursing homes left, and more closures are projected each year. More than half of these facilities are operating at a loss, and the costs of long-term care continue to rise, far exceeding national averages.

The shortage of home care workers exacerbates the problem. Maine needs at least 2,300 additional full-time home care workers, but the available pool of potential workers is shrinking. A 2023 study estimated that 8,000 workers are not in the labor force because they are caring for an older family member or someone with a disability. This situation impacts our state's gross domestic product and revenues, resulting in \$1 billion in lost GDP and reducing state and federal revenues by as much as \$70 million.

Family caregivers play a crucial role in supporting our seniors. There are 166,000 family caregivers in Maine, providing 155 million hours of unpaid care. The estimated economic value of this care to the state is \$2.9 billion. These caregivers are your constituents, and their efforts are invaluable. Yet, one-third of Mainers aged 75 and older have an income below \$34,000 a year.

There is also a crisis of social isolation across the state. 25% of adults aged 65 and older live alone. Many older adults who do not have severe medical conditions enter nursing homes due to social isolation and lack of nutrition.

LD 814 offers a logical and cost-effective solution.

Maine's five Area Agencies on Aging are on the frontlines, providing critical support to older adults and their families. Their programs and services offer direct support to seniors and are equally important to family caregivers. The Meals on Wheels program ensures nutritional support and prevents social isolation. With the shortage of home care workers and the closure of nursing homes, these agencies provide essential support and respite to family caregivers. Adult day health programs are vital for both seniors and caregivers, and multiple interactive programs help prevent social isolation. All of these programs support older Mainers to age in their homes, independently with dignity and support.

By keeping people out of nursing homes, these agencies save significant costs. The average cost of a semi-private room in Maine is \$146,364 per year. If these agencies can keep 150 people statewide at home, where they want to be, this results in a cost saving for nursing home care of \$21,954,600. We believe that these five agencies, with their services and programs, ensure that many more seniors can age in place and at home.

These agencies have also developed comprehensive community-based volunteer programs that save the state and federal government millions of dollars each year. The Area Agencies on Aging have over 1,200 volunteers across the state, who are critical to how they support their robust programming. The AAA volunteers contribute over 92,000 hours of service annually. This volunteer contribution is valued at nearly \$2.8 million of volunteer labor annually. This is another way that investing in the Agencies on Aging is a good financial choice for Maine because this would increase the Agencies' capacity to build their volunteer corps even more.

The most cost-effective way of caring for Maine's seniors and their families, who are your neighbors and constituents, is to pass LD 814. This bill is an investment, not an expense. It is a great financial decision for Maine, as well as a compassionate and prudent choice that will benefit Mainers, their families, and our state as a whole.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best,

Stephen Braverman