

*Testimony in Support of LD 814 - An Act to Provide Funding to Area Agencies on Aging for Community-based Services and Programs to Support Older Adults*

My name is Meg Barhite. I grew up in Gray and am now living here again, raising my young son. I am grateful for the opportunity to submit testimony in favor of LD 814, The Older Mainers Act.

May we all be lucky enough to have our loved ones grow old around us, and to grow old ourselves. LD 184 provides the supports and services we all need to ensure the choice to stay in our homes and with our families as we age.

I live along a dirt road that leads to a lake. At the end of the road is a cluster of homes, *all* filled by older adult residents. This thriving little community takes care of one another, and enjoys sunset happy hours on the beach and golf outings. Still – this year we have experienced two deaths due to cancer, and two other neighbors suffering from long-term illnesses. I have seen firsthand the challenges my older neighbors are facing in navigating available supports and services, untangling the knots of Medicare coverage to find the best plan for a specific medication or treatment, and the bone-deep, relentless strain of caregiving.

I work for the Southern Maine Agency on Aging (SMAA) – and my career includes ten years in an aging services non-profit in Boston. I oversee SMAA's volunteer-based programming; the calls we are fielding requesting volunteer support mirror the challenges my neighbors are facing. We hear from caregivers and older Mainers that they are looking for free solutions (volunteers) to fill in where current services are limited, do not exist, or are cost-prohibitive:

- Provide respite care
- Help fill out housing and benefits applications
- Explain application and follow up processes for housing and benefits
- Perform light household chores (e.g. preparing meals, sorting mail)
- Assist with grocery shopping and medication pick up/delivery

Further our existing and strong volunteer-based Medicare counseling program is in constant demand (serving over 1,680 clients last year and saving each an average of \$1,610 on out of pocket expenses!) and our Phone Pals telephonic companionship program has a waitlist of over 100 older adults.

It is clear to me - from both my personal and professional experiences - that older Mainers and their caregivers are hungry for increased support in navigating and accessing supports and services. With its provisions for case management, caregiver supports, Medicare counseling Meals on Wheels, and more, LD 184 will create a strong foundation for us all to age at home if we choose, and care for our aging loved ones.

Thank you to the Committee for your time and consideration.

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