

Testimony of Meredith Anderson, Scarborough Maine
In Favor of: LD 1451 An Act to Advance Coordination of Community
Transportation - Sponsored by Senator Mike Tipping

Submitted April 17, 2025

Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation:

My name is Meredith Anderson; I am a resident of Scarborough. I work for Southern Maine Agency on Aging. The Southern Maine Agency on Aging is the focal point in Cumberland and York counties for resources, services, and information to empower older adults, adults with disabilities, and their caregivers to live to their fullest potential.

I support LD 1451 and appreciate this legislation being brought forward, highlighting the critical need for increases in accessible transportation and transportation coordination for our state's most vulnerable community members.

We have found transportation to be the pillar of not only aging in place but thriving in place. We receive a multitude of calls each year with varying stories but the same need. In 2024, we received over 331 calls and in the past three years, we have received over 1,220 calls from older adults in Southern Maine who are in need of transportation options and help with navigating the existing systems.

A Resource Specialist at SMAA has been working with a 64-year-old woman who lives alone and faces significant challenges due to isolation and mental health issues. She has no informal support to assist her with transportation needs nor does she have the financial means to own and maintain a car. She relies on the Meals on Wheels (MOW) program for nutrition and uses Modivcare for transportation to medical appointments. Recently, she was enrolled in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) to help her be able to afford food. However, she has no means of getting to the grocery store to use this benefit. There are no volunteer transportation network or public transportation options in the remote town where she lives. The combination of financial constraints, isolation, mental health challenges, and lack of transportation creates a complex situation for this community member and so many others. While more towns are providing volunteer transportation options, there is still a big gap in service for the most vulnerable individuals living in rural communities.

Many individuals who reach out to us do not have access to technology and/or cannot afford internet services to be able to navigate transportation systems that may be available. Some older adults have expressed it is difficult to find transportation because they are not able to participate in options that require a phone app. Moreover, there are vulnerable individuals who

are not able to engage with complex systems due to cognitive, emotional or financial challenges and need support from others with navigation. Some older adults have also expressed being worried about being left at an appointment. More coordination and support will help to alleviate the stress for these individuals as well as make a more efficient and streamlined approach.

Many individuals who use a wheelchair and need support walking or waiting for a bus are not able to use current transportation options and even make it to a doctor's office. Some transportation supports are only available for medical appointments, meaning these individuals aren't able to go to the pharmacy to pick up their prescriptions, get groceries, go to the bank or post office, go to the Social Security Office or DHHS office, if needed. Not only are people not able to run simple errands to maintain their household, but they are also not able to participate in social activities. There is no access to transportation to church, a dinner, or coffee with a friend. Slowly, not only the circle of support dwindles, but so too does an individual's physical, mental and emotional health.

Access to reliable transportation enhances the overall well-being for older adults and helps individuals to remain living in the community longer. 87% of adults over 45 say that it is important to be able to stay in their own home as they get older. Thriving in our communities is the goal for so many of us; having access to transportation is essential to realizing that goal. Having mobility management hubs will provide better service and support for all residents. And what's more, the state can save a tremendous amount when older adults stay home and are not living in long-term care facilities before this level of support is truly needed.

Thank you for reading this testimony and for your consideration of an ought to pass vote for improving access to transportation and the well-being of our community members.

Meredith Anderson, LCSW

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