

Testimony of Regina Bowie, Resident of Presque Isle

Supporting: LD 1835 - An Act to Improve Nonemergency MaineCare Transportation

Sponsored by: Senator Richard Bennett

May 7, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Regina Bowie and I am a resident of Presque Isle. **I support LD 1835** and appreciate Senator Bennett and the other cosponsors for bringing this legislation forward.

I'm a person with a few disabilities, and I experience a lot of transportation barriers. Walking has been really hard for me lately, and I try to take local public transportation when I can. Sometimes I am able to drive myself to local appointments and also to run errands.

I have to use Modivcare transportation to go out of town for appointments, or for appointments like daytime procedures, where I need a ride home. I have to go to Bangor for some appointments, sometimes it takes me two to two and a half hours to travel, and it costs too much on a fixed income. When I need to go to the dentist, I'm not able to use Modivcare transportation, and I have to pay for the ride there and back. It is very hard to become a patient at a MaineCare-supported dentist because of the extremely long waiting lists.

Frequently, Modivcare's automated system to schedule rides is too complicated to use. The automated assistant is a nightmare to work with, especially when I need to speak with a real person to make myself understood. The repetitiveness of the automation system and not getting through to a human being to speak with is so draining. You try it, and you will see what I mean. If you had to do this even once for a family member who needs it, you would create change in this system.

Other times Modivcare transportation makes mistakes, or they have staff shortages, and I'm late to appointments. Once they cancelled on me altogether and I had to cancel my appointment. There were health repercussions because of that one missed appointment.

I don't always like going to the doctor, but I don't have a choice. People don't understand that when you have disabilities, you need to go to more and different kinds of therapies and medical appointments, which help you live with the disabilities you have and live a better life. They help you be able to do the important activities of life and

live your life in a better way, with fewer side effects and events leading to not being able to do the activities I want to do. For example, I recently testified in person on some other bills, and I'm still recovering from all that it required of me to physically do that. And when I'm mentally exhausted, it's hard for me to get anywhere.

I hear about other people who have transportation barriers, too. And one time I saw it for myself. I was using Modivcare transportation and was on the mini-bus, and we were waiting for someone to come out and get the bus. The driver just left, even though the person still had a minute to make the bus - which didn't make sense because they were just going up the street to drop me off at my appointment.

This bill will help by:

- Having an independent ombudsman program so that:
 - We all know how to share our complaints and concerns about Modivcare transportation. And in ways that follow the Civil Rights laws and allow different ways to make any complaints. For example, not requiring that we have to do it in writing.
 - We can safely share our complaints and concerns about Modivcare transportation without worries about it impacting our future rides.
 - We know someone will follow up on our concerns and make sure they are taken care of.
 - There are real checks and balances, making sure transportation providers are doing what they are supposed to. (And not doing what they want to do, which can lead to transportation nightmares for all of us.)
- Making sure I get to know the non-emergency transportation advisory committee in my area. This would help people like me in the community be able to go and make recommendations to improve Modivcare transportation.
- Making it easy to navigate everything through the public online dashboard. This would help me know about the regional meetings, see how my area is doing performance-wise, and be able to easily speak out about my concerns and ideas for how to make things work better.

Thank you for listening to my perspective. **Please vote Ought to Pass.**

Sincerely,

Regina Bowie