

LD 1835 — An Act to Improve Nonemergency MaineCare Transportation

Testimony of John Brautigam, Esq. for Legal Services for Maine Elders Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

May 9, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services.

My name is John Brautigam, and I am here today on behalf of Legal Services for Maine Elders. LSE provides free legal help for Mainers aged 60 and older when their basic human needs are at stake.

Let me begin with a case that very well could be from one of our clients — a woman in her 70s who missed three critical medical appointments last winter because her scheduled rides never arrived. Her appointments were for cancer treatment. She called the ride service. She filed a complaint. But no one ever followed up. She told us, "*I did everything right. And I still didn't get there*."

This vignette is not an anomaly. We hear stories like this far too often.

LD 1835 is a carefully designed bill that responds to those real-world failures. It would improve the transparency, accountability, and responsiveness of MaineCare's non-emergency transportation (NET) program — the very program that older adults depend on to access care that is often urgent and sometimes life-sustaining.

We support the creation of a **public performance dashboard**, which would help identify patterns of service gaps and give communities and policymakers the data they need to respond. We support the creation of an **independent ombudsman** — a neutral voice who can help ensure that rider complaints are not just collected, but actually resolved. And we support formalizing **regional advisory input** so the people most affected have a clear voice in shaping solutions.

These are not just service improvements — they result in a more just system. If a low-income older adult is denied consistent access to health care because transportation fails, their rights as a beneficiary are hollow. They may not know where to turn. They should not have to turn to legal aid.

LEGAL SERVICES FOR MAINE ELDERS, INC. 5 Wabon Street, Augusta, Maine 04333 (207) 621-0087 Fax (207) 621-0742 Offices in Augusta, Bangor, Lewiston, Biddeford and Presque Isle LSE Helpline 1-800-750-5353 (Voice/TTY) www.mainelse.org May 9, 2025 Legal Services for Maine Elders – LD 1835 Page 2

LD 1835 is also a **sound economic investment**. National studies estimate that each dollar spent on non-emergency medical transportation yields an \$11 return in avoided health care costs. That includes emergency room visits, preventable hospitalizations, and delayed diagnoses that become harder and more expensive to treat.

In a rural and aging state like Maine, we cannot afford to ignore that kind of return.

We often talk about access to health care as a right. But that right has little meaning if someone can't reach the doctor's office. For the older Mainers we serve, **transportation is the first link in the chain of care**.

This bill strengthens that link. On behalf of our clients, we urge you to vote **Ought to Pass** on LD 1835.

Thank you.