

LD 1835: An act to Improve Non-emergency MaineCare Transportation

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

I am Claire Berkowitz, the President/CEO of the Midcoast Maine Community Action and Board Chair of the Maine Community Action Partnership (MeCAP). It is my pleasure to speak in support of LD 1835: An Act to Improve Non-emergency MaineCare Transportation.

MeCAP is comprised of Maine's ten Community Action Programs (CAPs), with the mission to eliminate and alleviate the causes and conditions of poverty by assisting low-income individuals to move toward self-sufficiency. Each year we serve 150,000 Maine residents providing a variety of services, including Head Start and childcare, housing assistance, transportation services, home heating assistance, home repair, and weatherization.

CAPs receive Federal funds in the form of the Community Service Block Grant (CSBG), a designated sum of money distributed to each state to support services that address poverty and its causes. A recipient of CSBG funds, we are required by the United States Office of Management and Budget to perform regular Community Needs Assessments, a report that incorporates qualitative and quantitative data from our communities to guide our programming and keep us informed of the emerging and developing needs of our clients. This information is vital in the improvement of how our agency operates and how we show up in and for our stakeholders and community partners. Transportation is a community need that shows up in the assessments across all communities in Maine. Therefore, the public-facing dashboard, independent ombudsman program, and advisory committees proposed in LD 1835 would be key in ensuring the accountable and efficient use of federal funds for MaineCare NET.

In a state as sprawling as Maine, access to transportation is vital to every facet of daily life and plays a central role in our health and well-being. According to a report released earlier this year by the John T. Gorman Foundation, nearly 40,000 Maine households do not have reliable access to a vehicle and current transportation programs meet only 11% of Maine's total need.

Our healthcare system depends on the safe and reliable transport of its patients to their non-emergency appointments. Missed appointments mean delayed care, worsening medical conditions, and increased emergency room visits and hospitalizations for patients; last-minute cancellations mean lost revenue and missed connections for healthcare providers.

MaineCare NET, the non-emergency transportation component of MaineCare, ensures that patients have reliable and safe transport to everything from preventative care check-ups to cancer treatments and chemotherapy. National research shows that for

every \$1 spent on non-emergency transportation to Medicaid covered services, \$11 in health care costs are avoided.

MaineCare NET is the state's largest investment in public transportation, but it isn't perfect. At this time, too many MaineCare patients report challenges using these transportation services and feel that their concerns are not being addressed. The improvements made by LD 1835 would provide transparency, efficiency, and accountability to the program by sharing key performance indicator data with the public and MaineCare stakeholders in a user-friendly manner, as well as engage these groups in regional advisory committees to ensure that their voices are heard.

Thank you for your time.