

Testimony

Relating to

L.D. 1772, An Act to Support Public Health and Establish the Maine Commission on Public Health and Prevention

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Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

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Senate Chair Ingwersen, House Chair Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Jill Carney, Director of Maine Public Policy for the Alzheimer's Association, and a resident of Cumberland. The Alzheimer's Association supports L.D. 1772, which would establish the Maine Commission on Public Health and Prevention and charge this Commission with advising the Legislature on public health and prevention and assisting the Maine Center for Disease Control (CDC) with developing a State Health Plan. As *the Committee considers this legislation, however, we recommend that the final bill includes a definition of chronic disease that includes Alzheimer's and related dementia to promote the integration of Alzheimer's messaging into other chronic disease programs and healthy living promotion activities that the Commission created by this bill would oversee.*

Public Health Approach to Alzheimer's and Dementia Risk Reduction

Compelling data and evolving research show that cognitive decline and dementia warrant serious, concerted public health attention. The prevalence is large—and growing. An aggressive public health effort to reduce the prevalence of risk factors, such as high blood pressure, smoking, poor diet, and a lack of physical activity, could result in an estimated 1.2 million fewer people with Alzheimer's in 2050.

Dementia, however, is too often thought of as a normal part of the aging process. It is not. It is a disease that can be prevented or mitigated through lifestyle interventions that can come at any point in one's life. To increase public knowledge and reduce stigma around cognitive decline, change must begin at younger ages. As children learn the

dangers of tobacco and risk reduction strategies for cardiovascular health in primary school, they can also learn how to protect and promote brain health and normalize conversations about dementia, particularly since so many children have family members with dementia.

Messaging on dementia has not historically been incorporated into programs focused on prevention and healthy living, but there exists a significant opportunity if public health leaders in Maine have greater awareness of the connections between dementia and tobacco use, as well as other health issues. Progress on Alzheimer's research at the federal level is constantly improving our understanding of this disease, means of prevention, and connection with other chronic diseases. Efforts to integrate messaging on Alzheimer's and dementia into other public health efforts can be supported by the Maine CDC's Alzheimer's Prevention and Support Program or the BOLD Public Health Center of Excellence on Dementia Risk Reduction hosted by the Alzheimer's Association.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill and suggested amendment.

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