

Ann Hastings
Biddeford
LD 2212

To the Members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee and members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Ann Hastings. I am a retired attorney. I have lived in Biddeford for 15 years, although I grew up in Fryeburg, lived in West Baldwin for 24 years and practiced law in Limerick for many years, so I know first-hand what life in rural Maine is like for older Mainers. I have been on the Board of Southern Maine Agency on Aging (SMAA) for nearly nine years and have been a volunteer Medicare counselor at SMAA for seven years, so I know first-hand the importance of the many services Maine Agencies on Aging (AAAs) provide to Mainers.

I want to thank the committee membership for providing funding for Maine's AAAs in last year's supplemental budget. That one-time investment stabilized services and reduced long waitlists for Meals on Wheels and other services.

I can speak specifically to the great benefit Mainers received from the Medicare counseling that last year's funding helped to provide. Last year Mainers saved, on average, \$2,800 a year in health care costs after meeting with a AAA provided Medicare counselor. We are volunteers and are not affiliated with any outside agency. No AAA receives any commission or income of any kind from providing Medicare counseling. Our goal is to provide unbiased information so Mainers can make informed choices that best meet their needs. However, without additional and ongoing funding, we may not be able to continue our Medicare counseling services. As it is, we fill our available Medicare counseling slots well before the end of the annual Medicare Open Enrollment Period, leaving many Mainers with limited options for unbiased Medicare help and without the benefit of the savings our counseling services help them identify. As a result of limited funding, some Mainers must choose between paying for healthcare or paying for other basic living expenses, such as heat, food and housing. I believe so much in the benefit of Medicare counseling provided by our AAAs that, in my seventies, I drive each month from Biddeford to the Bridgton Community Center to hold Medicare counseling sessions there.

I urge you to make an investment in Mainers by allocating \$9.75 million of this year's supplemental budget to funding Maine's AAAs. This is needed so that the services you funded last year can be continued and expanded. Without this funding waitlists for older Mainers will surge and essential services will be cut. It will leave many Mainers without the resources to safely remain in their homes, resulting in greater risk of unnecessary and expensive hospitalizations and long-term care. It is a case of paying less now to save more later.

Thank you for your service,
Ann Hastings