



**Testimony of Jess Maurer on Behalf of
the Maine Council on Aging
to the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations
and Financial Affairs and Health and Human
Services**

Testifying in favor of LD 258

Greetings Senators Rotundo and Baldacci, Representatives Sachs and Meyer, and members of the Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services.

My name is Jess Maurer and I'm the Executive Director of the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of over 135 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older community members working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged, and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age at home and in community settings. I am testifying in favor of LD 258.

Mainers have successfully met the challenge of each new era with hard work and innovative spirits. We moved rocks to farm, cut timber to build ships, built factories to produce quality goods, and embraced technology to lead world-class research. That's why I know that Maine can lead again – in building a state that is fully able to support our new longevity.¹

Over the past decade, we have made some important gains toward this goal: building affordable housing, changing how we think about zoning, expanding insurance options, investing in a stronger direct care workforce, and funding programs that support older Mainers. Unfortunately, many of these gains have been incremental, and we are learning that they have not gone far enough. That's why we offer our full support for the healthy aging investments in the Governor's budget, and also say that they do not go far enough.

Here's what we're hearing – older people in Maine are being evicted from apartments, not because they cannot pay their rent, but because they're not able to get the home care they need. Some of these folks are entitled to care, but there are simply no care workers available. Others might be able to find a worker, but cannot afford to pay for care. Finding new housing or care can take considerable time and may leave older people homeless. Older people who are hospitalized often cannot be discharged because of home care and facility staffing shortages, leaving too many older people living in hospitals. These are becoming chronic problems.

Because of the efforts of the Maine Legislature, Maine just ranked 4th in the nation in PHI's Direct Care Workforce State Index. We've made real progress in valuing this workforce, but as we learned yesterday in a report issued by the Department of Health & Human Services, these efforts have only stabilized our workforce; they have not grown it. This report shows that 40% of people who are entitled Section 19 waiver home care services – mostly women, all nursing home eligible, are receiving no care or only partial care because of the workforce shortage. While we

¹ <https://longevity.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/new-map-of-life-full-report.pdf>

don't know where these people reside, we do know there are "care deserts" in Maine, areas where there are no workers available to provide services.

This session, we'll be asking you for more investments to help grow the workforce to reduce this gap in care. We'll also be asking you to increase funding for Maine's area agencies on aging, so they can help people who need housing and care navigate to those supports – something that takes months, not hours. We'll also be asking you to help put more money into the pockets of lower income older Mainers who have suffered economic injustice across their lifetimes, making it impossible for them to meet their basic needs much less pay out of pocket for the most expensive home care in the country.²

We also need the investments outlined in the Governor's budget. Notably, the budget includes more than \$3 million for Meals on Wheels. This program was operating at a deficit before the pandemic. The number of people served during the pandemic doubled. What the State found was that about 2/3 of the new pandemic recipients actually qualified for the program. Indeed, the numbers of recipients hasn't dropped off since mid-2020. Federal pandemic funding is exhausted and people will have to be removed from the program if this allocation isn't made.

Meals on Wheels recipients are homebound people who cannot prepare a meal and don't have others to prepare a meal for them. These meals keep people at home longer, and the social visits by the people who deliver the meals fend off isolation. This is a low cost program that delivers a huge return in investment, and we urge you to include this as on-going funding in the budget.

LD 258 also proposes a critically needed investment to operationalize many of the recommendations in the Elder Justice Roadmap. We are particularly pleased to see on-going funding for the Elder Service Connection program, and increased funding for Adult Protective Services and Legal Services for the Elderly.

We are fully in support of the proposed MaineCare rate increases for Adult Day Services, Independent Housing with Supports Program, and Adult Family Care Homes, as well as permanent funding to reduce the Section 63 waitlist. We further support the additional funding for nursing homes, behavioral health providers and PNMI's.

This is a yes...and. We support all of the investments proposed in the Governor's budget – they are critically important. And, we need to make additional investments if we are going to stem the tide of harm being experienced by too many older Mainers because we haven't yet built the systems that reliably support people living into their 80s, 90s, and 100s.

Maine has the opportunity to lead the country in capturing the benefits of a doubling of life expectancy. Now that we know this longevity is here to stay, we need to act with urgency to address the short-term system failures that have resulted from not being prepared for this new long life, and then build longevity-ready communities and systems that promote health and productivity long into later life. We urge you to vote in favor of LD 258 and hold allocations out to make other investments.

² <https://www.longtermcorecard.org/databystate/state?state=ME> – Maine ranks 50th in median annual home care costs.