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131st MAINE SENATE

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Testimony of Senator Eric Brakey

L.D. 587, "Resolve, to Automatically Increase a Residential Care or Nursing Facility Resident's Personal Needs Allowance Under the MaineCare Program When the Consumer Price Index Increases"

Before the Maine Legislature's Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Wednesday, March 22, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: I am Senator Eric Brakey, representing the people of Auburn, New Gloucester, Poland, and Durham. I am before you today to present L.D. 587, Resolve, to Automatically Increase a Residential Care or Nursing Facility Resident's Personal Needs Allowance Under the MaineCare Program When the Consumer Price Index Increases."

This legislation is one of several bills I am bringing forward this session to address, through various areas of state stature, the growing inflation crisis that is impacting the people of Maine. When I submitted this bill, I was pleased to discover that Senator Mike Tipping submitted the same legislative request. Therefore, we decided to sponsor this legislation together.

During the 127th Maine Legislature, this committee considered legislation (LD 90) to increase the personal needs allowance of residents at residential care and nursing facilities, brought forward by Rep. Peter Stuckey of Portland. This allowance is the small amount of funds — currently set at \$40/month for nursing home residents and \$70/month for assisted living residents — which residents get to keep from their Social Security checks to be able to purchase the simple niceties of life, including personal shampoo and deodorant. Rep. Stuckey noted at the time that the dollar amounts had not been increased since 1987. At the time, a bipartisan majority determined that — facing massive funding shortfalls for our nursing homes — increasing the personal needs allowance was not an immediate priority.

Today, however, as price inflation (which is largely generated by currency debasement at the Federal Reserve Bank in order to finance the federal government's massive and growing deficit) wipes out the purchasing power of the dollar, I believe we should index the personal needs allowance of residents to the annual Consumer Price Index. This would ensure that, at very least, the value of that allowance is not shrinking year-after-year as the federal government destroys our money.

Especially after the restrictions our seniors in assisted living and nursing facilities have endured these last few years through COVID, they deserve a little basic human dignity.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions to the best of my ability.