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Testimony of Representative Drew Gattine Presenting

LD 1684, An Act to Invest in the Health and Wellness of Older Maine Residents by Expanding Coordinated Community Programming

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and my distinguished colleagues on the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Drew Gattine and I am honored to represent parts of Saco, Scarborough and Westbrook in the Maine House. I am pleased to appear before you this morning to present **LD 1684, An Act to Invest in the Health and Wellness of Older Maine Residents by Expanding Coordinated Community Programming**.

I am very excited to bring this bill to you today because it provides an important opportunity to improve the lives of Mainers as they age in their communities by giving them the support they need to live the most independent lives possible. I am confident that is a goal that we all share.

I know that you are all familiar with the vital work that Maine's five Area Agencies on Aging – known as the AAAs – undertake on behalf of the constituents we serve. Caregivers usually call them when they need answers about accessing the resources that help older people live safely in their homes and communities.

Maine's five AAAs serve the entire state and have been around for over 50 years. People identify them with the Meals on Wheels program but they do so much more than that, providing family caregiver support services, and connecting people with benefits and services that can help them.

AAA staff dig in deep when someone calls to say they need help. They establish who is available to provide support, what their resources are to pay for care, what programs they qualify for if they cannot afford to pay, and how to stay safe if there is a lag or delay in accessing a service they need.

The AAAs are funded primarily by the federal government with very little state support. Maine gets the lowest federal allotment of funding available, despite the fact that Maine is the oldest state by median age, with 29% of our population over 60 and is also the most rural state with a widely dispersed population.

As we all know, Maine is experiencing significant challenges with workforce and housing. This is having a huge impact on our older neighbors. It is nearly impossible right now for an older person to find home care services, and many older Mainers with low incomes cannot afford those services even when they can find them. Five counties in Maine have no adult day services at all, so family caregivers who work are unable to find care for their older family members.

There are over 10,000 older Mainers waiting to access affordable housing and the wait can be up to 5 years. These people often call the AAA for housing help long after they need it, only to find there are no good options. This means the AAA must help the older person figure out how to live more safely in their home, for instance through home repair and modification.

People over 65+ represent the fastest growing segment of our homeless population.

As a result of all of this, the work of the AAAs is becoming far more complex and the challenges they are confronting require more extensive case management and system navigation to resolve. Every time they handle one of these complex cases, it means there are many other calls they won't be able to return quickly and many others they will not be able to help.

This bill takes a huge step forward in addressing this problem. It allocates one-time funding of \$500,000 to each AAA in fiscal year 2024 to ramp up infrastructure, training, staffing and service delivery models to better provide short-term case management services to older Mainers with complex needs. It then allocates ongoing funding to support these activities into the future.

Case management makes a difference. We provide these services for people with intellectual disabilities and behavioral health challenges and it greatly improves people's lives. Case management services for older adults are nearly nonexistent. The lack of dedicated funding to the AAAs for case management services means tens of thousands of other older people are not getting the support they need.

I urge you to support this bill and greatly appreciate the co-sponsorship of many members of this committee.

Coming behind me, you will hear very compelling testimony from people on the ground who will describe the need and the great promise that this bill holds.

I am happy to answer questions.

Thank you.