

Testimony in Support of LD1684
An Act to Invest in the Health and Wellness of Older Maine Residents by Expanding
Coordinated Community Programming

Good morning. My name is Heather Davis, and I am the COO at SeniorsPlus, the Agency on Aging serving Androscoggin, Franklin, and Oxford counties. The goal of SeniorsPlus is to assist older and disabled people to age well so they can stay at home, independently, as long as possible.

I am providing testimony in support of LD1684 - An Act to Invest in the Health and Wellness of Older Maine Residents by Expanding Coordinated Community Programming.

The staff at SeniorsPlus work with clients across the three counties we serve, two of which are rural – Franklin and Oxford counties. Currently, we are only able to provide short-term case management services as time allows, but most of our work is information and assistance which does not begin to address the needs of some of the older adults and adults with disabilities who reach out to us for help. And every year, as Maine's aging population continues to grow, we see the number and complexity of need increasing.

Self-care capacity, emotional well-being, support, and access to the services that helps Mainers figure out how to stay in their communities and the homes they love takes considerable assistance and time. That is what our social work staff are trained to do. When this is available it allows clients to stay at home for as long as possible versus moving to a significantly more expensive healthcare situation where they usually do not want to be. But due to current funding, staff are limited in the amount of time they can spend with clients who could benefit from short and longer-term case management.

Stories abound from clients we have been able to support with limited case management services. And our family caregivers providing supports are always so grateful to learn about what is available to help them and keep them from burning out. They want their person to remain home. But we also have those people in need of more care than we can provide.

While we used to be able to give information, resource assistance, and some help with applications, we are finding the need and complexity of situations to require more skill and time than current resources allow. Just one example - We often work with a woman who calls the agency frequently. She is known to the other agencies as we receive calls from others that try to help her. She had behavioral health case management in the past but is unable to keep a case manager very long. This woman is currently in a home that is condemned but the city is reluctant to remove her because there is nowhere for her to go. This woman is adamant that she wants to stay in her home despite not having transportation to get to appointments or help to get groceries and medications. She has no working appliances so heats food up in cans on her wood stove. She has broken pipes in her basement and no running hot water. She would benefit from someone that is able to work intensively to find resources that will help make her home more sustainable and safer.

Another big problem is the lack of personal support staff in rural communities which are hit even harder as those staff need to be recruited, provided with necessary training, and compensated for the hard, important work they provide. And to go along with that, transportation is a huge barrier. Transportation is either too expensive, not available, or does not assist people to physically getting to their destination and back in a timely manner.

Assessing client needs, problems, and capacity, then linking, arranging/coordinating services takes significant skilled staff time, especially when a client is homebound and home visits are required. Helping people navigate these complex challenges takes more time than is available. Increased funding would support our ability to have a greater number of staff, which would allow more time to deliver longer-term comprehensive case management services and coordination, and to a greater number of people. Currently, staff is stretched thin and staff capacity is the #1 barrier to us completing more in-depth case management services.

We ask for your support of this vital lifeline to comprehensively support more of our older adults and adults with disabilities in receiving the case management they often so desperately need.

Thank you for reviewing my testimony.

Respectfully Submitted,
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