



Free Legal Help for Maine's Seniors

May 1, 2023

Testimony of John Brautigam Esq., Legal Services for the Elderly, in support of L.D. 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 members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

On behalf of Legal Services for the Elderly I would like to testify in support of LD 1684. Legal Services for the Elderly (LSE) is a nonprofit legal services organization. We provide free legal assistance to Maine's older adults when their basic human needs are threatened. Our clients are all aged sixty or older and most have very low incomes. Some are the most physically and financially compromised people in our communities.

Maine's five AAAs are designated as Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs) and provide the entry point for Long Term Services and Support programs offered under State or Federal laws. In that capacity they have expert knowledge of many types of available programs such as: home and community based or facility-based nursing programs, personal care and assisted housing programs, prescription drug programs, nutrition programs, heating programs, tax related exemption or credit programs and many more sources of assistance.

Their staff members routinely explain the intricacies of eligibility for all these programs and help people access those that best help them meet their needs. They are truly system navigators. The "Triple A's" also make referrals to other organizations like Legal Services for the Elderly or the Maine Long Term Care Ombudsman Program for specialized help for individual cases. They are on a short list of some of the most experienced elder advocacy organizations in our State and we have considered them essential partners from the time we began offering our services to Maine's older adults.

In recent years it has become clear that, due to the complex medical and social circumstances of many older Mainers, case management support is essential in maximizing the chances of good outcomes. Case management services typically involve a trained professional who serves as the primary point of contact for the client and their family or caregivers. The case manager assesses the client's needs, develops a care plan, coordinates services and resources, monitors the client's progress, and adjusts the plan as

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needed to ensure that the client's needs are being met.

Case management requires more than just providing contact information or a little advice. It means actually finding providers of health and social service programs and engaging with them to solve problems. This is not easy. The Area Agencies have always delivered a small amount of case management services to the older Maine people who call for advice. Unfortunately, there is little funding presently available to support this more intensive type of help.

Older adults with modest means now experience chronic staffing shortages in their home health programs and severe housing challenges whether they rent or own their home. Additionally, the cost of food and other necessities continues to rise. We fear that the complex regulatory changes in Federal programs as the Federal Public Health Emergency ends will only add to these difficulties. The lack of case management services will predictably leave older adults with useful information but without a human being to help them take the next step when they hit a bump in the road. Evidence shows that this added resource can be very effective.

This bill provides funding that will enable the Area Agencies to begin the process of developing a case management system. This service will provide assistance that goes beyond supplying information. By helping older adults deal with problems which, if left unattended, will only grow larger and more expensive to solve, it will make a major difference in their lives.

We hope that you will support this vital need by voting ought to pass.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts with you and we hope that you will support LD 1684.