

Testimony of David C Burns, Whiting, ME.

before

the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

May 1, 2023

***LD 1684, An Act To Invest in the Health and Welfare of Older Maine Residents by
Expanding Coordinated Community Programming***

Senator Baldacci, Representative ^{Meyer} Ingwersen and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee On Health and Human Services, I am David Burns, a former member of the Maine House of Representatives and the Maine Senate. I am pleased to be able to testify before you again today in support of LD 1684. I want to thank Representative Drew Gattine for his sponsorship and support of this bill.

I have been a Board member of Eastern Area Agency on Aging (EAAA) for over 12 years, so you can imagine the importance of this bill to me. My support for this bill is even enhanced because of my concern and compassion for the people of Washington County and similar areas EAAA services. As the former Senator for all of Washington County and 2 ½ decades of serving there as a state trooper, I know first-hand the limited resources, poverty and need for support, especially for our older adults and adults with intellectual disabilities. During my time with EAAA any of our four Executive Directors I have worked with will tell you how hard I have advocated for more support and services for my very rural County. This legislation would greatly enhance EAAA and the other Agencies on Aging in Maine to provide more and better services, including "case management and navigation services" targeted by this bill.

As you know, 29% of Mainers are over 60 and those over 65 are our fastest growing population. EAAA services over 13,000 sq. miles, much of which is very rural. Washington County covers over 3,200 sq. miles with a population about 32,000 people. When the literature speaks about a "care deserts" where no home care or homemaker services are available, our catchment area experiences more than our share of a lack of services. This includes services for adults with intellectual disabilities. I am keenly aware of this because my wife and I have a 39 year old son with autism and fetal alcohol syndrome we adopted at 2 ½. We were told from the beginning that if we wanted services for Eric, we would have to move to an urban area. We didn't appreciate that advice and, fortunately, were able to advocate for what was available to meet his needs. Many families, however, are not able to acquire adequate services for their special needs children for many reasons, including their rural locations.

This legislation could provide the necessary funding to Maine's five Agencies on Aging that would greatly enhance the work we are already doing, but are unable to meet the needs of far too many older adults. I urge you to vote out a unanimous "Ought to Pass" on this LD to help ensure its passage in the full Legislature! And I thank you for your kind attention!