



Testimony in Opposition to LD 2214

An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30 2024 and June 30, 2025

February 26, 2024

Good morning, Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, esteemed members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, and the Health and Human Services Committee.

My name is Denise Vachon, and I am privileged to represent LeadingAge Maine and New Hampshire. LeadingAge proudly represents not-for-profit providers of nursing care, residential care, dementia care, senior living, affordable housing for older adults and people living with disabilities, and home and community-based services. We represent organizations, of course, but more importantly, we also represent the older adults who live on our member campuses.

LeadingAge Maine and New Hampshire is honored to stand with other organizations, many of us hailing from various corners of the network supporting and raising up matters of importance to older adults in Maine.

On behalf of our members and the citizens who rely on you to understand the urgency of this matter, we first thank you for your thoughtful work during this session, and again for your considerations of LD 2214.

Today, we offer testimony in opposition to the cuts in funding for the Medicare Savings Program (Section NN). Specifically, we ask you to correct the roll-back of the Medicare Savings Plan, and that you restore the expectations that were set forth with the funding of the program at the time of Supplemental Budget in 2023.

Though others can speak in more detail and technicality to this matter, the Medicare Saving Program would provide opportunities for older people in certain vulnerable income brackets to access the health and other services they need, and to take better preventive measures for their health and well-being, by off-setting Medicare costs. Said differently, the "savings" that this program could provide to older people in these vulnerable income brackets, will allow them to be able to afford additional other costs that can contribute to their health maintenance over time. Perhaps it's as simple as assuring that they can actually to purchase the food and medication that they need to stay healthy, without having to ration either. Perhaps it's an exercise program at a local gym, or to buy proper walking shoes so that she can join the ladies walking group in her neighborhood, supporting her joint health, her heart health, and perhaps helping to control her blood sugar, keeping the effects of arthritis at bay, and strengthening her gait, to prevent a fall. Perhaps it's the difference between being able to get a tooth repaired or not. Perhaps it's a repair to their home that tightens the envelope, saving money on heating costs, or sealing a roof leak, preventing unnecessary degrading of the value of their home, which helps compound the benefit and disposable income available.

Small investments in wellness yield big results. As the former CEO of a senior living community, it was profoundly clear to me what just a little bit of financial help could do to improve the quality my residents' lives. The more financially vulnerable they were, the more impactful these small financial opportunities became – from lessening the worry about access to health services, to accessing transportation services to get to appointments, to a reduction in stress that translated in the difference between worry and depression and isolation, and the impact of feeling better about life in general and engaging with neighbors and friends, or having the choice to opt for a social activity with a small price tag. With just a little bit of financial help, they could feel like they could put a little bit of money aside each month, “just in case”, or to fund the joy of putting a \$5 or \$10 bill in a card for the great grandchild's birthday. Absent that “little bit of help”, sometimes the money ran out before the calendar did.

Physical health. Mental health. Social engagement. All part of whole-person wellness. And healthy aging.

These are small things to those of us who don't have to be concerned about weighing heat against medications, or meals or getting out to take in an occasional show or sending a birthday card. But to those who live much closer to the edge, these can be difficult choices. Some can be hard. Some can start a cascade of health concerns.

The Medicare Savings Plan can make that difference.

A relatively small investment of state dollars can yield a significant Federal Match.

This will touch a lot of lives in ways that we cannot imagine. It will help people stay healthier longer. And that will save tax dollars in the long run.

Small investments. Big dividends.

We would respectfully urge you to reinstate the funding for the Medicare Savings Plan, and to direct the State to engage fully and immediately on the directives that were part of the original appropriation.

Your neighbors and mine, your family members and mine, your friends and mine. We all know someone for whom this program can truly be a lifeline.

Thank you for your good work, and for your thoughtful consideration.



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