

Testimony before the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Committee on Health and Human Services on

***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***

Public Hearing: Monday, February 26, 2024 at 10:00 AM

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Baldacci, and Representative Meyer, as well as Distinguished Members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Veronica Hopkins. I am an Administrator in a long-term care facility. I have worked for over 35 years in long term care.

I am submitting this testimony in opposition to LD 2214 as it does not provide enough funding for nursing homes and residential care facilities to continue providing care in Maine. Our industry has seen over 23 closures of nursing facilities since 2014, nine of which have occurred in the last three years. The funding shortfall is significant. For nursing homes, the 2022 shortfall is \$96.5 million for nursing homes and \$24 million for residential care facilities. This supplemental budget includes just \$10 million to address this significant gap.

Over my career I have seen many changes in the health care industry, most of them good. The one change I have not seen, adequate funding for the industry. The lack of funding has been an ongoing issue and I feel it has been detrimental to the industry overall. It saddens me the way we seem to have to fight for every little dollar. I have known many colleges who have left the healthcare field over the years and they have tried to convince me to do the same. Why do I stay? I stay because these extremely vulnerable residents need me. I cannot imagine where the 46 residents in our facility would be if we were not here. Ask any hospital how difficult it is finding a bed for a Mainecare resident. We have had family members who travel 2-3 hours or more to visit their loved one because there is no facility close to them. This is extremely difficult for family members who may not be in the best of health themselves. Families are desperate for help and cannot find it. There is a quote about how a great society is measured and the measure is how it treats the most vulnerable. It often feels like the geriatric population is the last one picked for the team. I have seen many good changes over the years in healthcare, there are still changes that need to be made and adequate funding is one of them. Janet Mills writes in her book about the difficulties she faced these last few years regarding COVID. I hear her. Unless you were in the healthcare industry you have no idea what it was like. Many nights I would cry because we did not have enough staff to take care of the residents like they deserved. It was heartbreaking. It was the worst experience of my entire career. As an industry we are still struggling to recover from COVID. I know there are people out there who want to forget COVID ever happened, but it did and the financial burdens we faced are still ongoing. Please help me to make things better for the 46 residents we care for and the dedicated employees who work here.

I want to thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions you have.

Warm regards,

*Veronica Hopkins*, MLA