

Testimony Before Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs 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 and Distinguished Members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Doreen Locke and I am the Director of nursing at Odd Fellows' and Rebekahs' Home of Maine, a multi-level nursing and assisted living facility in Auburn. I have been working in Long-Term Care for over 35 years. I began as a candy striper, then a C.N.A, and worked my way up from there.

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 was \$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.

I love my work; we have the ability to make a positive difference in our residents' lives every day! Our residents thrive in our care, often, they are getting more socialization and attention than they have ever had.

Our facility has 60 residents and 65 employees. Our residents receive medication management, three full meals and snacks in-between, several activities daily, cleaning and social services to name a few. It takes many, dedicated staff to run a facility, over 90% of our residents are paid through MaineCare and Medicare which does not provide adequate reimbursement to pay for those staff or services.

COVID caused facilities to either raise pay or use temporary staff. Temporary agencies sometimes charge more than double and there is no extra MaineCare payment for that. We have had to absorb huge increases in our pay to our employees to keep them and attract new employees. To adjust to the challenges presented by staffing shortages, I have had to, besides my job, fill-in as a hairdresser, a housekeeper, cook, in addition to my regular duties. I came here because I love what I do, and I will do whatever I can to support this great industry.

Our industry has changed, residents in assisted living now need the kind of care they used to receive in nursing homes. Our populations have seen a big growth in people with mental

health needs and we are now seeing people as young as 30s needing assisted living facilities, which brings on even more challenges and additional funding needs. Employees have higher expectations than ever, in pay, in flexibility... but it is still a wonderful workplace. For the residents, we make positive changes in their lives daily. We constantly receive comments and letters and cards from family members expressing their appreciation for how well we care for their parents. It is very rewarding work and is a very needed industry.

Maine's long-term-care budget shortfall fails to recognize the importance of nursing homes and assisted living homes for the care of our elderly population. Not taking action puts Maine at risk of more closures and more families having to travel hundreds of miles to visit their parents in a facility.

Nursing homes and assisted living homes are important for Maine, and significantly more funding is necessary. Without additional support from the legislature, more families will lose access to important health care in their community as more facilities will close.

I thank the committee for your time, and I am happy to answer any questions.

Doreen Locke, RN
Director of Nursing Services
Odd Fellows' and Rebekahs' Home of Maine
85 Caron Lane
Auburn Maine 04210