

Testimony

Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee

February 27, 2024

Presented by: Bill Flagg, Director Community Relations

Cary Medical Center

163 Van Buren Road, suite 1

Caribou, Maine 04736

Thank you Senator Hickman and Representative Supica for this opportunity to submit written testimony in support of LD 2217 'An act to strengthen the Maine Veterans Homes with increased and ongoing funding'. Over the past forty plus years I have been privileged to work with Veterans in Aroostook County. It was the dedication and commitment of a small group of Veterans here that established the first VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic in the nation on the campus of a community hospital. This took years of effort and often being told it would never happen. Today, based on this model several hundred of such clinics are located in some of the most rural areas of our nation. Many of those who worked on this project here in Caribou are now gone but their legacy lives on. Veterans here in Northern Maine who had once been forced to travel 500 miles round trip for a basic health exam or other treatment at the Togus VA Medical Center can now access that care and other healthcare services close to home.

Once the Veterans clinic was established on the campus of Cary Medical Center these same Veterans saw the need for additional services, including Long Term and Residential Care. Once again working together, in one voice, they were able to secure the beautiful facility that now exists attached to Cary Medical Center. The home makes it possible for Veterans and the spouses of Veterans to obtain long term and residential care close to their homes with the support of family and friends. Long term and residential care can be a very lonely experience without such support and our home, here in Caribou, has made a major difference in the lives of hundreds of Veterans and families here in the County.

Veterans are a very special group of people. Many, having seen the ravages of war, particularly in Vietnam, live with the experience which, like Veterans before them, bonds them together in a unique brotherhood or sisterhood. The Maine Veterans Homes recognize this fact and the care provided is sensitive to the Veterans experience. No one is more deserving of the very best in healthcare, including long term care, than those who have been willing to pay the ultimate sacrifice in defense of our freedom.

Beyond the unique benefit that our Veterans Home here in Caribou provides to our Veterans it is also a powerful economic driver for our local economy creating a number of jobs and opportunities for healthcare professionals.

I urge members of this committee to support LD 2217 in honor of our Veterans sacrifices. We cannot and must not close the doors on these facilities who provide such a vital and necessary service to Veterans. Again, I thank you for the opportunity to offer my testimony.