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THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

**Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs on
LD 2217, An Act to Strengthen the Maine Veterans' Homes with Increased and
Ongoing Funding
February 27, 2024**

Senator Hickman, Representative Supica, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs: I am Senator Rick Bennett of Oxford, and I have the honor of serving 14 communities in Western Maine in the State Senate. I am pleased to cosponsor LD 2217, "An Act to Strengthen the Maine Veterans' Homes with Increased and Ongoing Funding."

America's veterans risked their lives and limbs while serving to protect and defend our country. As a society, we owe them an incredible debt. It is our responsibility to ensure the comfort and care of those who served our country.

In 1977, the Maine Legislature created Maine Veterans Homes (MVH) as a nonprofit to provide long-term care services to our veterans and eligible family members. Providing this care to those who have served is still a responsibility but the ability to deliver this critical service has been threatened in recent years due to funding gaps.

In the early 1990's as a member of the Maine House, I had the pleasure of working with the MVH system in siting the Western Maine Veterans Home in South Paris, with tremendous community support. For the past 30 years now, the Western Maine Veterans' Home offers respite care, 28 rooms for assisted living residential care, and 62 beds that provide long term care, short term skilled nursing care, memory care, and rehabilitation and therapy services. The needs are particularly acute in western Maine. My region has lost three nursing facilities within the last six years, part of a terrible trend plaguing rural Maine.

As I am sure you all remember Maine Veterans' Homes lost \$14 million in FY 2023. This shortfall is the result of the cost of care exceeding reimbursement rates, an issue that plagues all nursing homes in our state and that was severely exacerbated during the pandemic.

LD 2217 would provide \$3.1 million in annual funding to MVH. Combined with the \$765,000 in Governor Mills' budget, MVH would be able to draw nearly \$8 million in federal funds and close the \$11.7 million reimbursement gap.

As citizens, we have a moral duty to ensure this essential care is provided to those who served our country. Unfortunately, without the enactment of LD 2217, MVH will have to seriously face the prospect of closure. MVH need a sustainable funding source; LD 2217 provides that source.

I strongly urge you to support LD 2217 and appreciate your consideration.