

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY FROM MICHAEL POOLER, COLONEL, RETIRED**  
**BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AND LEGAL AFFAIRS, 131<sup>ST</sup> MAINE LEGISLATURE**  
**IN SUPPORT OF LD2217, AN ACT TO STRENGTHEN THE MAINE VETERANS' HOMES WITH**  
**INCREASED AND ONGOING FUNDING**

**FEBRUARY 27, 2024**

Good afternoon, Chairperson Hickman and Chairperson Supica and committee members I appreciate the opportunity to provide my support for and add some context to LD 2217.

My name is Mike Pooler, and my wife Sue was a resident of the Augusta Veterans Home from October 2016 to April 2023. I am extremely fortunate to be on the Maine Veterans Home Board of Trustees. This is my and Sue's story.

I earned a reserve commission as a second lieutenant from the University of Maine at Orono in 1986. In 1990, I transferred to the Maine Army National Guard until my retirement from federal civil service and the Maine Army National Guard in 2019. In late 2007, I volunteered to deploy to Afghanistan, was in country from April to November of 2008 and returned home in January of 2009. These statuses and timelines are pertinent to my wife's long term care story.

My wife, Sue, was diagnosed with dementia in 2013 at the age of 48 and needed full time professional memory care by September of 2016. In between these dates, I was fortunate to be able to privately hire caregivers to come to our home and look after Sue during the day. These people, along with Sue's sister, provided daytime and some weekend care while I was working for the Maine Army National Guard. I had the night shift and weekends while I continued to work.

As I explored options for her future nursing home care, the Maine Veterans Home (MVH) option rose to the top of the list. Thankfully, MVH reserves 25% of their beds for spouses of veterans. One of the reasons she was eligible for a bed was because of my deployment. As a national guardsman, generally unless one deploys, they are not eligible for a veteran's home placement. I know many guardsmen who served twenty to forty years and have never been deployed, and they are not eligible to use the MVH system. As the number of veterans declines over the next twenty plus years, the number of people eligible for MVH will decline. This seems to be the only business model where the customer base will decline, absent another few ten to twenty plus year wars.

Again, we were extremely fortunate the administration of the Augusta home was very prompt in responding. It took three to four weeks from the time I called MVH until Sue was admitted in October of 2016. I placed Sue on two other local nursing home lists as we went through the admission process and six months after Sue's placement, I heard back from one of them.

During Sue's stay, it was obvious from the start that the staff in Augusta were and continue to be special people. One of the first nurses I met, as she was talking to Sue, stated that she would never lie to her and would always tell her the truth. She was not going to tell Sue something just to calm her down. That is indicative of the dignity and respect the staff gives each resident. The staff takes great pride in the fact they care for veterans and their spouses, many times sacrificing higher wages at other places to care for them.

Over the years, and especially during the past three years, there has been tremendous staff turnover. As you may be aware, people with dementia need to see consistent faces to help alleviate stress. Also, each dementia patient has unique needs that staff learn during their time with the residents. Staff understand when a resident does not feel well, especially when they are nonverbal. Finding health issues early leads to higher quality care. As spouses visit, we help the staff by providing insights into what works when taking care of our loved ones. Over the years of visiting our spouses, the staff become a second family to many of us. They tell us how our spouses are doing, any trends they see, what made them laugh, what is working for them or changes in behavior. Many weeks I spent more time with the staff than the rest of my family. The funding from LD 2217 will help alleviate staff turnover to ensure the best care MVH residents can receive.

As Sue declined, the Augusta home worked very well with hospice and the local hospital, at times telling the hospital what needed to be done for Sue. During Sue's last week, they continued to closely monitor her and made her as comfortable as possible. When she passed at midnight on April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the staff lined the halls, some crying harder than I was, as I wheeled her out.

If I have to end my years someplace other than my home, I hope there will be room for me at the Maine Veterans Home.

I am confident I speak for all the spouses when I urge you to pass LD 2217 to ensure veterans and their spouses continue to receive the great care they have earned protecting this state and nation. Thank you.

## REMARKS

Good afternoon, Chairperson Hickman and Chairperson Supica and committee members. I appreciate the opportunity to provide my support for and context to LD 2217.

My name is Mike Pooler, and my wife Sue was a resident of the Maine Veterans Home in Augusta from October 2016 to April 2023. I am a veteran of the Afghan war and also extremely fortunate to be on the Maine Veterans Home Board of Trustees

My wife, Sue, was diagnosed with dementia in 2013 at the age of 48 and needed full time professional memory care by September of 2016.

In September of 2016, the star aligned, and it only took three to four weeks from the time I called Maine Veterans Home until Sue was admitted to the Augusta home in October of 2016

During Sue's stay, it was obvious from the start that the staff in Augusta were and continue to be special people. One of the first nurses I met, as she was talking to Sue, stated that she would never lie to Sue and would always tell her the truth. She was not going to tell Sue something just to calm her down. That is indicative of the dignity and respect the staff gives each resident. The staff takes great pride in the fact they care for veterans and their spouses, many times sacrificing higher wages at other places to care for them.

Over the years, and especially during the past three years, there has been tremendous staff turnover. As you may be aware, people with dementia need to see consistent faces to help alleviate stress. Also, each dementia patient has unique needs that staff learn during their time with the residents. Staff understand when a resident does not feel well, especially when they are nonverbal. Finding health issues early leads to higher quality care. As spouses visit, we help the staff by providing insights into what works when taking care of our loved ones. Over the years of visiting our spouses, the staff become a second family to many of us. They tell us how our spouses are doing, any trends they see, what made them laugh, what is working for them or changes in behavior. Many weeks I spent more time with the staff than the rest of my family.

Sue passed in 2023.

I am confident I speak for all the spouses when I urge you to pass LD 2217. It will help maintain quality staffing and to ensure veterans and their spouses continue to receive the great care they have earned protecting this state and nation. Thank you.