



**Testimony of Marge Kilkelly
on Behalf of the Maine Council on Aging**

In Favor of LD 209

Delivered in Person on January 22, 2025

Greetings Senators Rotundo and Ingwersen, Representatives Gattine and Meyer, and members of the Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services,

My name is Marge Kilkelly, and I am a policy consultant with the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of over 135 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older community members working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged, and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age at home and in community settings. I am testifying in favor of LD 209 generally, but am also raising concerns that the Supplemental Budget as proposed fails to recognize several critical infrastructure deficits that need to be addressed immediately, deficits that impact health of older people and our access to care.

For nearly a decade, the legislature has acted swiftly and decisively to address waitlists for core services like Meals on Wheels and Home Based Care (Section 63), ensuring older Mainers can access these critical safety net programs when needed. The legislature has also been proactive about taking action to grow Maine's Essential Care & Support Workforce – a workforce that helps older Mainers with daily activities whether at home or in residential settings. One critical action you took was to support this fragile workforce by ensuring annual COLAs, making sure wages grow with the cost of living. We have three basic concerns:

- Three out of five area agencies on aging have waitlists for Meals on Wheels. In Aroostook County, some residents may wait for a year before beginning to receive meals. For those who don't know, Meals on Wheels recipients cannot prepare a meal on their own and have no one to prepare a meal for them. Most do not have adequate resources to meet their basic needs. Can you imagine being older, alone, unable to make a meal, swallowing your pride to ask for help, only to hear you'll have to wait a year. This is fully unacceptable and the current waitlist for Meals on Wheels should be quantified and included in the Supplemental Budget to ensure everyone who is waiting to receive a meal right now can access one.
- There is a large and growing waitlist for Section 63 Home Based Care is a state funded program that provides home care services to medically eligible older and disabled people who lack sufficient financial resources to pay for in-home services, and who do not

qualify for MaineCare services. In any given year, once the funds are exhausted, the Department starts a waitlist for the service. Unless there is additional funding, no one comes off the waitlist. Some of these people have high needs where nursing homes are the only alternative if they cannot get home care. We are here today because Supplemental Budgets are the time to fill gaps, keep promises and address needs in the current budget year.

- Finally, last year, the Department issued the AAAA report¹ outlining the efforts it has taken to grow the essential care and support workforce. This report highlights that implementing COLAs for this workforce was a part of these efforts. Yet, as found on page 17 of the report, despite the efforts outlined in the report, the care gap between those who are entitled to care and those who got care grew significantly. For instance:
 - Section 19 went from 33% in 2022 to 50% in 2023
 - Section 96 went from 47% in 2022 to 62% in 2023
 - Section 63 went from 53% in 2022 to 71% in 2023
 - Occupancy rates in Residential Care facilities declined from 86% to 73%
 - Nursing home occupancy rates which had been climbing, also fell slightly

We are falling further behind in meeting the care needs of older Mainers and this is directly related to our inability to grow the workforce to a sufficient level to meet demand. The Department has not issued COLAs for these workers as required by law, and the Supplemental Budget does not ask for sufficient funds to meet the COLA increases. We cannot afford to lose more workers from this workforce nor for the care gap to grow. Again, we ask the Committees to quantify the shortfall in appropriations and to appropriate sufficient amounts to implement the COLAs.

I would be happy to answer any questions you have.

Marge Kilkelly

¹ <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/inline-files/Efforts-Progress-Implementing-Recommendations-Commission-to-Study-LTSS-Workforce-Issues-3rd-annual.pdf>