

Testimony of Meredith Anderson on behalf of the Area Agencies on Aging to the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

In favor of LD210: An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027

Submitted on February 14th, 2025

Good afternoon, Senators Rotundo and Ingwerson, Representatives Gattine and Meyer, and members of the Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services.

My name is Meredith Anderson, and I am the Community Outreach Director at Southern Maine Agency on Aging. I am here on behalf of Maine's five Area Agencies on Aging: Spectrum Generations, Eastern Area Agency on Aging, Southern Maine Agency on Aging, Aroostook Agency on Aging, and SeniorsPlus. These agencies, as mandated by the Older Americans Act, provide essential and life-saving services across the state.

I am testifying in favor of LD210, and I urge you to adopt future amendments to support both Mainers and the economy. One such amendment is *An Act to Provide Funding to Area Agencies on Aging for Community-Based Services and Programs to Support Older Adults*, which is being sponsored by Representative Kristin Cloutier. The Older Mainers' Act will directly address the ever-growing needs of older Mainers by providing additional funding to Maine's Area Agencies on Aging. These agencies provide essential services to older Mainers: Meals on Wheels, case management, caregiver respite, Medicare counseling, and so much more.

The legislature has worked to address gaps in services and funding, but it has not been enough. Older Mainers are struggling; they are losing their homes, their access to care, their social and community supports, their ability to live independently at home. More and more Mainers are becoming caregivers for both their aging parents and their grandchildren. One such Mainer is Pam, a 70-year-old woman who is the primary caregiver for her disabled adult son and two grandchildren. Since November 2023, Pam and her family have been without permanent housing. They have been utilizing General Assistance to rent a motel room, and her grandchildren have started excelling at school. However, due to the uncertainty of those funds remaining available, Pam and her family will again face unstable housing. Pam is among the 52% of single older Mainers who lack funds for basic needs. The complex and intersectional needs of Pam and her family could be met through hands-on, wrap-around case management services provided by the Area Agencies on Aging yet current limits in funding make it difficult for our agencies to provide this necessary service. The Older Mainers' Act would allow the Area Agencies on Aging to provide such services to an additional 1,100 older Mainers.

By building out the services and programs offered by Maine's Area Agencies on Aging and focusing on prevention and early intervention, the Older Mainers' Act is an investment in the health and resiliency of our communities for generations to come.

What the Older Mainers' Act Would Provide for Individuals Across Maine



The Older Mainers' Act would also allow for more than 335,000 additional meals to be provided through Meals on Wheels programs and would eliminate waitlists for Meals on Wheels across the state. Meals on Wheels is a low-cost program that provides significant financial return to the state, along with nourishment, safety, and connection for recipients. National studies show that Meals on Wheels reduces risk of admission to hospitals and rehab facilities, as the nutritious meals and frequent check-ins by delivery drivers ensure recipients are in good health. Meals on Wheels helps ensure that older individuals can age at home longer, a desire that 87% of Mainers aged 45 and older have. It costs less than \$10 per day to provide Meals on Wheels services to older Mainers, versus the \$258.55 daily cost to Mainecare for institutional care.

A Significant Return on Investment

If, through Meals on Wheels, case management, and other critical services the Agencies on Aging provide, we can keep just 103 older Mainers out of Medicaid-funded nursing homes for one year, the Older Mainers' Act will have paid for itself.

What Is Meals on Wheels

In addition to providing meals to older adults, Meals on Wheels offers an opportunity for social engagement and wellness check-ins by volunteer delivery drivers. These check-ins are essential for the health and safety of older Mainers. Meals on Wheels volunteer Sam was delivering meals to long-time recipients Debbie and Mark. From frequent interactions with the couple, Sam learned of Mark's cognitive decline. There was a marked shift in Mark's behavior towards Debbie, which had become violent and even resulted in injury. Sam reported this to Meals on Wheels site staff, who then contacted APS to intervene. Mark and Debbie were able to receive proper intervention and care from this check-in, resulting in a happier and healthier future for both.

Volunteers and Financial Impact

Sam is just one of over 1,000 Area Agencies on Aging volunteers, who contribute over 92,000 hours of service annually. This volunteer contribution is valued at nearly \$3 million of volunteer labor annually, which is another way that investing in the Agencies on Aging is a good financial choice for Maine.

Other critical services that Agencies on Aging provide, such as Medicare counseling, help Mainers keep money in their pockets. Through increasing Medicare education, counseling, and application support, the Older Mainers' Act will save Mainers **over \$3.6 million** so they can age at home and reinvest in the economy.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this urgent matter. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Meredith Anderson, LCSW





MAINE ASSOCIATION
OF AGENCIES ON AGING

THE OLDER MAINERS ACT

AN ACT TO PROVIDE FUNDING TO AREA AGENCIES ON AGING
FOR COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES AND PROGRAMS TO
SUPPORT OLDER ADULTS

CREATE A MAINE WHERE

Every older Mainer has access to ongoing, direct support to access essential benefits and services

Every caregiver is supported

Every older Mainer that wants to can stay in their home



The Older Mainers Act will pay for itself if Agency on Aging services can keep just 103 older Mainers out of Medicaid-funded nursing homes for one year.

87%

of Mainers over 45 who say that it is important to be able to stay in their own home as they get older

52%

of single older Mainers lack money to pay for their basic needs

Everyone benefits when longtime community members can stay in their homes.

By building out Agency on Aging services and programs and focusing on prevention and early intervention, the Older Mainers Act is an investment in the health and resiliency of our communities for generations to come.

HELP MAINERS STAY IN THEIR COMMUNITY

Prevention & Early Intervention to Support Older Mainers

336,837

MORE MEALS PROVIDED

The Older Mainers Act (OMA) will eliminate waitlists and expand reach for Meals on Wheels statewide

1,105

MORE MAINERS GIVEN HANDS-ON SUPPORT

The OMA will provide hands on, wraparound case management services statewide, which are known to significantly delay institutional care

>\$3.6 M

ADDITIONAL \$ BACK IN MAINERS' POCKETS

Through increasing Medicare education, counseling, and application support, the OMA will save Mainers money so they can stay in their homes and reinvest in the economy

Meals on Wheels 2024 Maine State Fact Sheet
AARP Maine's 2024 Vital Voices survey
Data from the Agencies on Aging

