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TESTIMONY

LD 815; An Act to Provide Funding for Respite Care and Supplemental Services Provided by the Family Caregiver Support Program

Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

March 14th, 2025

Good morning, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Laura Harper. I am a Senior Associate for Moose Ridge Associates. I am here today to present testimony on behalf of the Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program.

The Ombudsman Program provides statewide advocacy for residents of nursing homes, assisted housing including residential care and assisted living and for recipients of home care and adult day services. Additionally, the program serves patients waiting for discharge from the hospital who encounter barriers in accessing the long-term services and supports they need.

We are pleased to present testimony in support of LD 815 that provides ongoing funding to the DHHS, Office of Aging and Disability Services to provide respite care and supplemental services for family caregivers and older relative caregivers. LTCOP supports funding this critically needed program that assists family caregivers and allows older adults to stay in their homes longer.

Thousands of Mainers care for family members who are older or have a disability. Respite care alleviates some of the burdens and stress faced by family caregivers of older adults while they are safely cared for at home, in a facility, or in an adult day center. Keeping older adults independent in the community should be a top priority, as nursing homes continue to close

The Respite for ME pilot program which operated from Oct 2022 through Sept 2024 was an essential resource to many families who reached out to LTCOP looking for help. The final evaluation for the Respite for ME pilot program was submitted to the legislature in January, it highlighted the significant outcomes and achievements through serving 782 caregivers. For

caregivers who still work, the grant program decreased the negative impact on their work by 22%. Caregivers reported the respite program allowed them to leave the home and socialize, concentrating on rejuvenating their own physical and mental health.

Each week LTCOP hears from family caregivers who are looking for support to keep their loved one at home safely while also managing to work or care for their young children. Furthermore, LTCOP often hears from spouses of older adults needing respite care who are putting off their own health needs due to lack of support. LTCOP has seen family caregivers delay cancer treatment, pressing surgeries, and rehabilitation to meet the needs of their loved one. LTCOP has seen family caregivers end up hospitalized due to a lack of care for their own health, which subsequently results in the hospitalization of the older adult they are caring for.

Caregiving is physically, emotionally, mentally, and financially challenging. Respite programs are critical to help relieve these burdens and stress; we should support family caregivers with the continuation of this funding.

Thank you for your consideration.