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Testimony in support:

LD 623, *"An Act to Enhance Support Services for Individuals with an Acquired Brain Injury"*

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

March 18th, 2025

Good afternoon, 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.

LD 623 updates the provision of law regarding core support services for individuals with an acquired brain injury. The bill ensures that the Department of Health and Human Services enters contracts with organizations that are based out of the State of Maine or have an affiliate in Maine established and directed by families, caregivers and individuals with an acquired brain injury. It also codifies in statute access to online brain injury screening and support system and collaboration with the department on brain injury grants to the definition of "core brain injury support".

LTCOP receives calls from numerous ABI survivors and caregivers each year who are trying to remain independent in the community and are looking for resources to do so. LTCOP works diligently to advocate for the home care supports that survivors need, but often survivors and caregivers need more than just home care for support. LTCOP works closely with ABI resources facilitators and support groups across the state to help survivors' identify and find community resources. LTCOP supports these essential programs being contracted by Maine state providers or affiliates, led by people who understand the unique challenges that face Maine people.

Secondly, LTCOP supports greater access to online brain injury screening, as often it is the most vulnerable populations that do not get screened. For example, according to 2021 data from the CDC, falls account for half of all TBI related hospitalizations. CDC data also indicate that older adults and adults with disabilities are much more likely to have a fall, but less likely to be screened. A missed or delayed diagnosis can lead to unnecessary long-term health problems. LTCOP supports codifying the importance of brain injury screening in the current statute, no new resource would be needed for this as the Online Brain Injury Screening and Support System (OBISSS) is already being used by the Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS).

LTCOP supports the department partnering with federal brain injury grants to make BI core supports and services more accessible.

Thank you for your time and consideration.