

**Testimony of Melissa Paquet on behalf of the Area Agencies on Aging to Health and Human Services Committee**

**In favor of LD 814: An Act to Provide Funding to Area Agencies on Aging for Community-based Services and Programs to Support Older Adults.**

Submitted on March 28th, 2025

Good morning, Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Melissa Paquet, I am a resident of Biddeford and a social worker on the care coordination team for Southern Maine Agency on Aging, serving York and Cumberland counties.

I am here today in favor of LD 814, the Older Mainers Act.

**Story 1: Anna's Journey with SNAP**

Let me start with the story of Anna, a 96-year-old woman who lives alone in her own home. Anna has outlived her husband and both of her sons. After a recent hospital discharge, she worked briefly with a social worker, who helped her apply for the Medicare Savings Program (MSP) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), for which she was found eligible. The social worker made a referral to our agency, recognizing that Anna would need support activating her EBT card and looking into other resources for in-home support.

When Anna received her EBT card, she didn't know how to activate it. Because she is hard of hearing, she couldn't call the number on the back of the card for assistance. This is where case management made a real difference. I was able to visit Anna at home, activate her EBT card, and demonstrate how to use it at the cash register. This simple intervention allowed Anna to access her SNAP benefits, which are essential for her health and well-being.

During that visit, we also discussed resources for transportation and in-home support. This was a shared conversation; she was able to ask questions, and more importantly, she could hear and understand me clearly since we were sitting across from one another in her kitchen. Without this support, Anna would not have been able to use her EBT card or learn about local programs for transportation and in-home care services.

## **Story 2: Helping a Blind Client After Loss**

I want to share Wayne's story and his journey with our agency to show how many different programs he benefited from, with just one referral.

Wayne is a 74-year-old blind man, he was referred to our I & R team because his wife had just died, and he needed financial assistance for burial costs and information on assisted living facilities.

Wayne was assigned to the care coordination team, where I had the privilege of working with him. He was agreeable to a home visit even though he had just lost his wife. Through our conversation it became clear he didn't want to move to an assisted living facility, he wanted to move to a 62 plus community. During our visit we were able to assess the extensive needs he had, and we came up with a plan.

We worked on several housing applications, I would fill them out for him, he would sign and date them, we gathered all documents needed BC, SS card, bank statements etc. We made a referral for homemaker services, for the Senior Companion program and to Maximus for home care services. We made a referral to the Iris Network for support with technology to help him read his mail. We filled out applications for fuel assistance, for the PTFC and his recertification paperwork.

We were diligently working on the paperwork needs and homecare needs, but we needed to address his social isolation.

We talked about attending one of our Community Café's, which was close to where he was currently living, he did RSVP for one but unfortunately was not able to attend because of surgery. I made a WIN fund request to purchase him some board games and cards that were in Braille, so he could use those when he moved to his new apartment or if he did decide to attend a community café, it would be an avenue to build relationships with new people through games.

I connected him with our Phone Pal program. Wayne enjoyed his weekly calls with his phone pal, and they fostered quite a relationship. Which would also prove to be extremely important. Over time, during my encounters with Wayne, I noticed signs of sadness and he spoke about losing his wife, and it became clear that he was struggling with depression. Wayne's phone pal was also concerned about the change in his mood. Wayne and I called his Primary Care Doctor's office together to let them know he was truly sad and feeling hopeless, we asked for mental health support. Wayne started working with a Nurse Case

Manager in the practice and he began weekly counseling sessions over the phone with a therapist.

Thanks to the connections and relationships Wayne had with our agency, that one initial referral changed his life.

### **The Importance of Case Management**

It's important to note that while anyone can assist someone in filling out an application, the real challenge often lies in the follow-up. For instance, applying for the Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) can be done over the phone, but the crucial step comes afterward. The client needs to submit important documents—like a photocopy of their birth certificate, Social Security card, driver's license, utility bills, and fuel bills—by a specific deadline. For many older adults and individuals with disabilities, this is where they get stuck. They may not have access to a photocopier or the physical or cognitive ability to gather and submit the required documents on their own.

Case management at the Area Agencies on Aging plays a vital role, we bridge the gap. By working directly with individuals like Anna and Wayne, we can ensure they are not only aware of the services available to them but that they can successfully access and utilize these services to live independently and with dignity.

Thank you for allowing me to share the important work being done at the Area Agencies on Aging.

Sincerely,

Melissa Paquet

Biddeford

Southern Maine Agency on Aging

\*Names are changed for protection of privacy