

Testimony of Cordelia Hill 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 Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. Thank you for all of your work on behalf of the people of Maine.

My name is Cordelia Hill. I am a social worker and I live in Portland.

Since 2020, I have worked as a resource specialist with ***Southern Maine Agency on Aging (SMAA)***, the Area Agency on Aging that covers York and Cumberland Counties.

I am here today to offer testimony that I hope demonstrates why your support of **LD814, the Older Mainers Act**, is critical.

As a resource specialist, I do my very best to connect older adults and people with disabilities to information and resources that will meet their needs. I receive referrals from primary and mental health care practitioners, legal service providers, and departments within SMAA, like Meals on Wheels and Phone Pals, AgeWell and Medicare Counseling programs. SMAA also offers walk in hours at the public library, and people can stop in to see me there, without an appointment.

We know that 52% of single older adults lack money to pay for what they need (Maine State Fact Sheet, MOW). The people who I work with are often facing financial hardship. They have difficulty paying for food, utilities, transportation, and help with personal care. Housing is also a challenge. Our information and referral line has received over 200 housing related calls since January of this year.

Many older Mainers are struggling to make ends meet. Here are a few real-life examples that illustrate how Agencies on Aging impact the lives of older adults and save money over the long term by addressing problems early on.

An Initial Call Leads to Multiple Connections

Maureen, who lives on a fixed income of a little over \$2000 a month, was referred to me by our Phone Pals program. She shared with the volunteer who calls her weekly to chat, that her furnace had broken, and she would not be able to cover the cost of this unexpected expense.*

I called Maureen, introduced myself and asked if she would be open to talking with me about her situation so that we could look for ways to help with this cost. She agreed and over the next few months, we:

- *Connected with community organizations that helped pay for fixing the furnace,*
- *Confirmed that Maureen had an application pending for the Home Energy Assistance Program,*
- *Applied for Medicare Savings Program (MSP) and SNAP, and*
- *Submitted Property Tax Fairness Credit (PTFC) forms with my co-worker's help.*

In addition to meeting her initial need (the cost of fixing the furnace), Maureen received \$716 in PTFC for the past three years and will save more than \$185 a month with her MSP and SNAP benefits. She also knows that SMAA is a trusted resource that she can contact again, should she need information or support.

A Phone as a Lifeline

John stopped by our agency's walk in hours at the public library. A librarian suggested that SMAA might be able to help him with his phone. John's original Lifeline, "Government Phone" had stopped working. He wanted to return it and start over with another company. We met several times to complete a new application, respond to correspondence about the phone that had been mailed to John, and eventually to activate his replacement phone when it arrived. The Agency on Aging was available to meet with John in a place that was convenient and accessible to him. With our support, he successfully navigated through barriers that had hindered his ability in the past to get a phone that worked. John can now communicate with others including social service and medical providers using this essential technology.

Housing: Staying in their own Home

My coworker shared this next example with me. A legal service provider referred Sam to SMAA because she was facing eviction. Property management had advised Sam that she would need to declutter her apartment for health and safety reasons. During conversations with Sam, our resource specialist learned that she had a sister who might be supportive. The resource specialist asked Sam if they could contact her sister together. Sam agreed. They called her sister and she was willing to help with tidying

up the apartment. In this example, the resource specialist took time to gain Sam's trust, learned about her situation, and together they came up with a solution that was agreeable to Sam. The costs associated with paying to have the apartment cleaned or finding an alternative place to live, if she had been evicted, were both avoided with this intervention.

I urge you to support the Older Mainers Act so that we can continue to reach older adults, like Sam, John, Maureen and others who are finding it hard to keep up with rising costs.

It is not uncommon for people tell me, **"I never imagined I'd be in this situation."** When we provide timely support, not only do we save money in the long run, but we also empower older adults by offering a place that they can turn to when they need help.

Thank you for your time and consideration, for your care and commitment to older Mainers. I'd be happy to answer any questions that you might have.

Sincerely,

Cordelia Hill

Portland

Cumberland County

Southern Maine Agency on Aging

*Client names throughout are changed to protect privacy.