



Testimony of Joy Barresi Saucier, Executive Director, Aroostook Agency on Aging in Support of LD814 An Act to Provide Funding to Area Agencies on Aging for Community-Based Services and Programs to Support Older Adults.

Good morning, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. I am Joy Barresi Saucier, Executive Director of the Aroostook Agency on Aging.

I am here today to testify in strong support of *LD814 An Act to Provide Funding to Area Agencies on Aging for Community-Based Services and Programs to Support Older Adults. I will refer to this as the Older Mainers Act.*

Thank you to Representative Cloutier and the co-sponsors of the bill, including Senator Stewart of Aroostook, for bringing this important legislation forward.

Our goal at the Aroostook Agency on Aging is to help older people age in their homes and home communities. We know that this is best for them and best for our communities.

As legislators representing older adults of Maine, I am reaching out today to ensure you are aware of the many challenges older Mainers are facing, especially in rural Maine. Many older adults living in the most rural regions of Maine have significant difficulty accessing supportive services in the home and have barriers to staying connected to their communities. Statistically, the facts are clear in Aroostook County.

- 60% of older adults lack sufficient income to meet basic needs.
- 46% of our older neighbors live alone, increasing the risk of social isolation.
- 29% no longer drive, making it challenging to access critical services.

We are in a time of continuous growth in the numbers of older people living in our communities and our most rural communities typically have higher populations of older people. For example, in Aroostook, currently 26% of our population is age 65 or older, which is 3 points higher than the state and 8 points higher than the US. And, we have many communities in rural Maine that exceed these numbers significantly, with towns in Aroostook like Oakfield at 36% and Eagle Lake at 47% over the age of 65. We will continue to see this population grow as 1 in 3 Aroostook County residents will be 65 or older by 2035.

Because of this population trend, extensive community support is required now and must be continually developed to improve the health and support the independent living of our residents to reduce the risk of institutionalization.

As just one of the many examples,

(Continued) Testimony of Joy Barresi Saucier, Executive Director, Aroostook Agency on Aging in Support of LD814 An Act To Provide Funding To Area Agencies On Aging For Community-Based Services And Programs To Support Older Adults to the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services.

A resident from one central Aroostook community presented just this week at the Aroostook Agency on Aging office with concerns for an older woman she recently met who requested to park the car she is living out of in the resident's driveway. When asked, the older woman was unable to answer simple questions about where she was from, if she had family, or even how old she was – appearing to have difficulty with her memory. The resident was unsure how to help. She spoke with one of our Agency staff members, who scheduled a time to visit her home to meet the older woman and further assess the situation. While the resident was speaking with our staff, being an older person as well, she also shared some of her own needs and was able to access information and referrals to supportive programs. Although the Agency responded to both individuals with offers of information, assistance, and referrals to other services, both situations truly require the assignment of a case manager that could assist intensively over the next weeks and months until needs are fully met.

It may occur to you that this is the role of the Agency. We agree as we are the place to go for information and assistance, the provider of Meals on Wheels, caregiver support, and case management. With that said, we do not have sufficient funding to do this type of intensive case management to the extent necessary to respond to the increasing demand.

While this story depicts just one of the many challenging situations faced, it is worth noting that we are also seeing significant increases in requests for service. At the Aroostook Agency on Aging, information and assistance volume is up 36% from 2020 and our partners at Legal Services for Maine Elders have seen a 21% increase in service hours from Aroostook County since 2020. Both these services are leading indicators of increasing complexity of needs in the community that could benefit from additional case management capacity.

In addition, most of Maine is rural and a significant portion is designated as frontier and remote like Aroostook County where the Aroostook Agency on Aging annually serve nearly 5,000 clients spread out across 4,000 square miles. Driving from the northernmost point in Aroostook to the southernmost takes over 3 hours. Our rural residents have significantly limited local resources at their discretion with formal and informal support often miles away. They need our help.

Additional funds made available to Agencies on Aging through LD814 can be used to provide one of the most beneficial services to rural, older Mainers: access to intensive case management services.

I urge you to support the Older Mainers Act and I appreciate your efforts as we work together to continue to meet the needs of older adults living independently in most rural regions of the great State of Maine.

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MAINE ASSOCIATION
OF AGENCIES ON AGING

THE OLDER MAINERS ACT

LD 814: 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 (LD 814) will eliminate waitlists and expand reach for Meals on Wheels statewide

1,105

MORE MAINERS GIVEN HANDS-ON SUPPORT

LD 814 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 LD 814 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

