



**Testimony of Sharon Foerster on Behalf of
the Maine Council on Aging to the
Committee on Health and Human Services**

**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 March 28, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee.

My name is Sharon Foerster, I am a Community Member of the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA), and Vice President of the Board of Directors. The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of over 140 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older community members working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged, and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age at home and in community settings. The MCOA is a unifying force across sectors that is creating a new narrative about aging and older people in Maine with the goal of building local, statewide, and national support for the systemic changes needed to support our new longevity. I am testifying in favor of LD 814.

Maine is home to more than 400,000 people who are over 60 and make up 23% of Maine's population. Everyone over 60 is eligible for services under the Older American's Act offered by Maine's five Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs). Many older Mainers are living active, healthy lives, and will only need to call an AAA for help enrolling in Medicare. For tens of thousands of other older Mainers, however, the AAAs are a lifeline connection to desperately needed services, supports and solutions to challenging problems.

Far too many older Mainers are only "one away" – one health problem away, one unexpected expense away, one home system failure away, or one loss away from crisis. Our independent spirits and ingenuity often leave us believing we'll be able to find a solution to our problems, as we always have. We wait to ask for help until we really need it.

However, far too often when someone finally asks for help, they find what they need is unavailable. With a growing direct care workforce shortage, a severe housing shortage, waitlists for services like home care and home delivered meals, and drained funds for respite care and heating assistance, AAA staff are challenged to find solutions for older Mainers who are living on the edge and need help now. Calls that used to end with three referrals and a wish for good luck, now take months of intense case management to find care, housing, or services for older Mainers. Meanwhile, others who are calling for help have to wait.

The funds the AAAs receive under the Older Americans Act are insufficient to keep up with growing demand for increasingly complex help. AAAs receive very little funding for case management

services, one of the greatest needs they have now. While the state has increased funding for Meals on Wheels, this funding has not kept pace with demand for the program, and more than 1,300 older Mainers are now waiting for meals.

An investment in AAA services is an investment in prevention. AAAs help avert the crisis and make it possible for older people to live healthy lives at home. The downstream costs of not meeting the need now include increased utilization of emergency services, hospitalization, and long-term care. Put simply we can invest a small amount now or pay a lot later.

Every dollar invested in the AAAs goes much further because they effectively use 92,000 volunteer hours every year to deliver services that would otherwise cost nearly \$2.8 million if delivered by staff. By enacting LD 814, the AAAs will be able to:

- **Provide over 1,100 older Mainers with case management services**
- **Provide 336,837 nutritious meals** to the 1,300 people waiting for home delivered meals
- **Help older Mainers** with Medicare counseling, education, and application assistance
- **Enable caregivers to stay in the workforce**
- **Expand hours** for Information & Referral phone lines

The MCOA urges you to make sure older Mainers can access the supports and services they need by voting in favor of LD814.

Thank you for your consideration.