



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Representative Laura Supica presenting

LD 182, An Act to Require the Department of Health and Human Services to Establish MaineCare Reimbursement Rates for the Maine Veterans' Homes on a Per Resident Basis

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. I am Laura Supica, and I represent House District 22, which includes a portion of Bangor. I am here today to present **LD 182, An Act to Require the Department of Health and Human Services to Establish MaineCare Reimbursement Rates for the Maine Veterans' Homes on a Per Resident Basis**.

I am honored to serve as House Chair of the Veterans and Legal Services Committee. During my tenure, I have come to know and appreciate the outstanding services the Maine Veterans' Homes (MVH) provide to our service veterans, their spouses and to Gold Star families. These services, for which they have received numerous awards, include assisted/residential, long-term, short-term skilled nursing, rehabilitation/therapy, dementia/memory care and respite care.

I expect some of the families and residents here today can provide firsthand accounts of this service. I also know how hard it has been for MVH to secure adequate funding to maintain its six homes in Augusta, Bangor, Caribou, Machias, Scarborough and South Paris.

As just one example, in 2019, MVH came before this committee with LD 606 for cost-based reimbursement. That bill was amended and unanimously passed by this committee to give some \$1.3 million in General Funding to MVH and leveraging another \$2.3 million in federal funding.

While that bill ultimately died on the Appropriations Table, on June 6th, 2019, D-Day, Representative John Martin challenged his fellow Appropriations Committee about denying funding to MVH. His challenge resulted in a GF appropriation of \$750,000, that could leverage another \$1.3 million in Federal funding. And despite that appropriation in the supplemental budget enacted shortly thereafter, MVH was forced to hire a national consultant to move DHHS

to submit to CMS the necessary State Plan Amendment (SPA) to leverage the federal funding. The SPA was ultimately successful the following year.

Then COVID hit, driving down the census, hugely increasing both labor and supply chain costs. As a result, the Board of MVH decided after much deliberation, to close the Caribou and Machias facilities. This was my first term, and my first term on VLA, and the testimonies and conversations that took place have forever shaped my priorities. The Chief Executive and Legislature reacted by passing emergency legislation, LD 2001, in 2022, requiring all six homes stay open, a requirement, as this Committee knows all too well, is not shouldered by other nursing and care facilities.

This is what we stated in no uncertain terms in LD 2001 §601. Statement of policy; purpose; location of homes; additional services:

Statement of policy. It is the policy of the State to ensure the provision of long-term care, support and services to eligible veterans and their family members in every region of the State and the intent of the Legislature that the Maine Veterans' Homes implement this policy by providing long-term care, support and related services to fulfill the State's moral obligation to promote the well-being and dignity of the veterans who have served their nation, often in times of war and at great cost. (37-B MRSA §601)

Despite providing some funding since then, we, the State, have not yet fulfilled our moral obligation to “ensure the provision of long-term care, support and services to eligible veterans and their family members in every region of the State . . .”

I’m asking you to unanimously send LD 182 to the full Legislature to fulfill our moral obligation that is enshrined in current law.

My bill proposes to secure a line item in the baseline budget that, by requesting state funding of \$4,261,615, drawing an estimated federal match of \$6,970,897, for a total of \$11,232,512. While the fiscal note says more, MVH believes these numbers are more accurate.

Without this funding, MVH will have to continue to draw from capital investments to meet its operational losses, as it has been forced to do since 2022. At the current rate, MVH will be insolvent in less than 2 years. MVH will have to examine admission denials based on estimated care, look at reducing staff and again look at closing units, levels of care, services offered and reduction of homes. We obviously don’t want these results. So please join me in unanimously passing LD 182 to fulfill our stated moral obligation.

“As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words but to live by them.” - President John F. Kennedy

Thank you so much for your consideration, and I am happy to answer any questions.