



Richard A. Bennett
Senator, District 18

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

**Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and
Financial Services on LD 1413, "An Act to Amend Laws Governing
Hearing Aid Dealers and Health Insurance to Allow an Exception to
Certain Hearing Examination Requirements"**

April 15, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services: I am Senator Rick Bennett of Oxford, and I have the honor of serving 14 communities in Western Maine in the State Senate. I am proud to sponsor LD 1413, "An Act to Amend Laws Governing Hearing Aid Dealers and Health Insurance to Allow an Exception to Certain Hearing Examination Requirements."

I sponsored this bill after hearing a deeply moving story from my legislative aide about her grandmother's final weeks. Joan Woodcock Nestler was the beloved matriarch of the Bangor Woodcocks. Originally from Long Island, she fell for a cute doctor from Bangor and made Maine her home. In her 100 remarkable years, she was dearly loved by her 7 children, 18 grandchildren, and 19 great-grandchildren. There were few things she enjoyed more than participating in wide-ranging discussions about history, politics, literature, and more with her friends and family.

In late 2023, she became seriously ill and was admitted to the hospital for several weeks. As her condition declined, she was transferred to a nursing home and hospice, where she stayed for over a month until her death in February. While she was in this facility, her hearing aid became lost.

It is important to understand that many years earlier Joan had become completely deaf in her left ear. She had also suffered significant, but not total, loss of hearing in her right ear. Her hearing aid made all the difference. She was able to converse, watch television, listen to music, and with some important assistance, maintain a significant measure of independence. Without the hearing aid, she could hear if people looked directly at her and the room was quiet. But she couldn't hear people, mostly staff, who came into the room and spoke to her without making eye contact and positioning themselves near her right ear.

The loss of her hearing aid could not have come at a worse time. Joan was in hospice care. She had become frail and could not be easily or safely moved, except very limited distances. When her daughter, Julie, who was Joan's most devoted advocate and unofficial caregiver, discovered that the hearing aid had become lost, she alerted the whole family. They all began to explore what it would take to get a replacement. Although it first appeared that it would be simple to replace the hearing aid, Joan's

family soon found that a brick wall stood between them and a new hearing aid. That brick was Maine law.

As she neared the end, Joan's family from all over visited as frequently as they could. Family knew to lean in closely and speak very loudly in her "good" ear. Otherwise, their words—words of love, gratitude, comfort—would go unheard. As anyone who has lost a loved one knows, those last conversations are precious. For Joan and her family, those moments were painfully diminished by a law that didn't account for the reality of end-of-life care.

With the loss of Joan's hearing aid and the inability to replace it, the pain and stress of Joan's impending death was immeasurably magnified for her and all who loved and cared for her.

LD 1413 is written to acknowledge the limitations in current statute by allowing humane exceptions to the hearing aid examination requirements for people in situations like Joan's. It would allow compassionate, commonsense exceptions to hearing aid examination requirements for individuals in hospice or similar situations. It doesn't undermine standards of care—it ensures dignity in care.

Imagine if it were your parent or grandparent—confused, isolated, and unable to hear the voices of their loved ones in their final days—all because of a technicality. No one should have to experience that.

Thank you for your time and consideration today. I respectfully urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 1413 to ensure our most vulnerable residents aren't stuck in silence when they need connection the most.