

Testimony of Mireille Kabongo, Resident of Portland – May 9, 2025

Supporting: LD 1835 An Act to Improve Nonemergency MaineCare Transportation

Sponsored by Senator Richard Bennett

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Mireille Kabongo and I am a resident of Portland. I support this bill and appreciate Senator Bennett and the other cosponsors for bringing this legislation forward.

I am a person with a disability. I am a Community Transportation Leader and a Mobility Liaison with the Greater Portland Council of Governments. Since 2017, I have been speaking about problems with our transportation system, because I have a transportation barrier. This is not the first time I have testified.

Without transportation, you have nothing. You can't do anything without it. Lack of transportation stops my life. Sometimes I can't get to work, or to the grocery store. You are not able to be part of society. I don't want to stay home. I have worked because I didn't want to stay at home.

On top of my disability, in 2022, I had a stroke. I was alone and I could not afford the food I needed or transportation to services.

I used MaineCare transportation to get to medical appointments and physical therapy. I have spoken out about MaineCare transportation for people with disabilities. We miss appointments because of different reasons and excuses they have.

For example, I live in an apartment on the second floor. The rides they provide are not on time. And when the transportation arrives outside, I need to get up from where I am sitting, leave the apartment, use the elevator to get downstairs, and get to the front door. But it takes time. The driver gets impatient and says I take too much time. Even if it's just 3 or 5 minutes, they leave without me. They have a problem understanding the needs of a person who is older or has a disability and mobility issues. But this is who the service is for.

Many times I have called to complain, and they put you through to voicemail and don't pick up. I have given up and I don't call anymore. They also don't have enough drivers to drive everyone who needs it.

For two years now, I have not gone to physical therapy. This is because there were so many problems with MaineCare transportation that I gave up. I finally have a new PT appointment this month and I am worried about how I will get there, because of the trouble I had in the past.

How can DHHS not fix this?

The last thing I want to say is this. Today, you have the authority to change this. We are depending on you to make the right choice. To make transportation better, so we can get to essential services. You can improve transportation access for Mainers. Or we can continue with the problems we have now.

Thank you for your consideration. I urge you to vote **Ought to Pass on LD 1835**.