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TESTIMONY

IN SUPPORT

LD 2021: An Act to Add an Online Option for Reporting of Suspected Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of Adults

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

January 14, 2026

Good morning, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Laura Harper. I am a Senior Associate at Moose Ridge Associates, I live in Hallowell and I'm here today on behalf of my client, the Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program.

The Ombudsman Program provides statewide advocacy services for older and disabled adult residents of nursing homes, residential care and assisted living and for recipients of home care services and participants in adult day services.

We are pleased to submit testimony in support of LD 2021, An Act to Add an Online Option for Reporting of Suspected Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of Adults.

Current law requires that reports to the Department of Health and Human Services regarding abuse, neglect or exploitation of adults must be made by telephone. This bill adds the option of reporting by an online portal to align state law with federal regulations promulgated in June 2024 that require states to allow at least 2 methods of reporting, one of which must be online.

As advocates, we work statewide to educate staff in long-term care facilities regarding their responsibility to report abuse, neglect, and exploitation. We believe that creating an additional reporting mechanism would help remove barriers and increase reporting rates. Many workers have shared that contacting APS by phone feels intimidating. This proposed amendment may

offer a more accessible reporting option, thereby strengthening protections for vulnerable residents. This may also increase the rate of referrals.

The Maine Elder Justice Roadmap established by the Executive Order of Governor Janet T. Mills released in December 2021 highlights that elder abuse is often unreported. The report states that there were over forty thousand Mainers over age 60 who experienced some form of abuse in 2020, though research shows that most abuse cases are never reported to authorities.

This legislation establishes an important safeguard for vulnerable residents and may improve reporting outcomes.

Thank you for your consideration.