



Testimony of Joy Barresi Saucier, Executive Director, Aroostook Agency to the Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services Joint Standing Committee on LD 2212: An Act Making Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027.

Good morning, Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, and Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Joy Barresi Saucier, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Aroostook Agency on Aging.

I am here today to respectfully request that the 132nd Legislature include funding in the Supplemental Budget to ensure that older Mainers can continue living safely and independently in their home communities, as proposed in LD 814.

Research shows that a strong majority of older adults want to age in place, yet nearly all will eventually need some level of assistance to do so. This challenge is more pronounced in Maine's rural regions, where access to essential services is limited or distant. In Aroostook County, the median age of 48.2 is significantly higher than both the state and national averages. Nearly half of older residents live alone with a median income of just \$21,547, and one in three no longer drives. Additionally, more than 62% of Maine's land area is classified by USDA as "Frontier and Remote Level 4," meaning residents often live far from even the smallest towns, having to drive long distances to reach everyday services.

Our population is also aging at a rapid pace. Currently, 26% of Aroostook residents are age 65 or older—well above state and national rates—and many rural towns far exceed even that, with places like Oakfield at 36% and Portage Lake at 56%. By 2035, one of three Aroostook County residents will be 65 or older.

These realities make clear that the need for strong, well-funded community support is urgent. Rural areas simply do not have local resources capable of meeting the growing demand. While the Aroostook Agency on Aging is the trusted provider of information and assistance, Meals on Wheels, caregiver support, and case management, our funding is inadequate to meet current needs, let alone future growth.

Despite last session's one-time statewide \$3 million investment, our agency had to reduce staffed hours by 10,000. Our Meals on Wheels program continues to maintain a waitlist of more than 250 homebound individuals—some waiting up to a year for meals. Without the additional funding outlined in LD 814, service reductions and waitlists will worsen. In Aroostook alone, we expect the Meals on Wheels waitlist to exceed 350 people by the end of 2026.

Out of respect for your time today, many volunteers and community members have submitted written testimony in lieu of presenting in person. I encourage you to read their powerful words. I have also attached an impactful story of one of our clients.

I urge you to support Maine's older adults by including this critical funding in the Supplemental Budget. With your leadership, we can make a wise investment, helping older adults remain safely in their homes and communities—the place each of us hopes to age.

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Aroostook Agency on Aging

Wayne's Way Forward on Life's Journey: A Story of Strength, Family, and Hope

In the heart of Aroostook County, where the winters are long and the soil is rich, Wayne spent his life *growing* more than just potatoes. He cultivated a life rooted in hard work, quiet leadership, and devotion to family. His farm, stretching across generations and acres, wasn't just a business—it was a way of life, a source of pride, and the heartbeat of his days.

Neighbors knew Wayne as a man of principle. He could fix anything with a wrench and a little grit, and he never missed a sunrise. But in the spring of 2025, the rhythms of Wayne's life began to falter. Tasks that once came naturally—managing equipment, remembering crop schedules, tracking invoices—became sources of confusion and frustration. The land he once commanded with confidence now felt like a stranger's. And when the decision was made to sell the farm, something in Wayne shifted, his life changed.

His family noticed first. The weariness in his eyes. The conversations repeated. The moments of silence that grew longer with each passing week. His daughter, Melanie, strong and pragmatic like her father, struggled with what she was seeing. She knew her dad wasn't just aging—something deeper was happening. But the system offered little help.

One day Melanie received news that shook her: Wayne had been referred to a specialist in Bangor for help, but the wait for an appointment was 14 to 18 months. A year and a half without answers was quite discouraging.

Coincidentally that very evening, Melanie attended a local professional women's group meeting, where representatives from the **Aroostook Agency on Aging Memory Center** spoke about their work. They shared something remarkable—that comprehensive dementia services were being offered by the local Agency on Aging in collaboration with primary and specialty healthcare providers.

After the presentation, Melanie approached the team and shared her father's story. It was a conversation that changed everything.

Within weeks, Wayne had an appointment at the Memory Center in Presque Isle. There, he wasn't just another patient on a long waiting list. He was treated as a whole person—a farmer, a husband, a father, a man navigating unfamiliar territory.

The Memory Center team conducted thorough assessments, bringing together clinical expertise and Agency on Aging resources with deep compassion. They listened not just to Wayne, but to his wife and family—acknowledging the emotional toll that caregiving can take. They didn't rush. They didn't minimize. They simply did what Wayne had done for others all his life: showed up, worked hard, and stayed solid on the ground.