

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Meghan Allen, I am a resident of Old Orchard Beach, and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 17.

It is crucial for seniors and people with disabilities to be able to get to their doctors, pharmacists and grocery stores. LD 17 would improve our transportation infrastructure and provide a lifeline for these individuals, while creating employment opportunities for Mainers.

I'm here to share a personal story, and also to speak on behalf of my best friend who is no longer with us. When the state's Medicaid Transportation System was privatized, many recipients of these services found themselves, quite literally, out in the cold. Previously, this service was operated by regional transportation providers reimbursed by the state. But by the time my best friend was in the position to use these services, that system had been overturned and replaced by the new brokerage system.

In 2015 my best friend and I moved into an apartment in Portland together. She was physically disabled; and though I provided many caretaking responsibilities- my vehicle could not support her equipment. She depended on the transportation systems which I speak to now. More times than I can count, I would have to leave work to return home and bring her back into the apartment from the curbside. The rides never came, or arrived after the time of her scheduled appointments. Health complications would arise as a result of not getting to the doctor: catheters that were supposed to be replaced became infected; medications couldn't be filled, and her body depended on them to survive. Late night 911 calls replaced routine care as symptoms and health issues went unaddressed. How much does it cost for an ambulance to respond to a situation that could've been avoided? Hopefully not the cost of another life, or a critical situation, because paramedics were preoccupied responding to a call that ultimately never should have been placed.

I've read and listened to the grievances of many others, who's experiences with this system are just as formidable: but those stories are not mine to tell. I will note, however, that many of these individuals live in communities where resources are more plentiful; so I can only imagine what the experiences are for those rural Mainers who also depend on these services.

We don't need any more research—it's been done. The Department of Health and Human Services has done that work. They support this pilot program; as do I. We need action. I thank you for soliciting the help of everyday Mainers; for hearing their stories. And I am hopeful that we can resolve a reasonable solution, together, with this piece of vital legislation.

Thank you.

Meghan Allen
Old Orchard Beach