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It's 2021 and the Maine legislature still hasn't repaired the damage the Lepage administration did to our Medicaid transportation program in 2013? We are the oldest state in the country (<https://www.prb.org/which-us-states-are-the-oldest/>), 16% of our population has a disability (https://www.maine.gov/labor/cwri/data/disabilities/maine_workers_with_disabilities.docx#:~:text=From%202014%20through%202018%2C%20nearly,of%20residents%20had%20a%20diability), we have the 5th highest number of disabled veterans in the country (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2019/07/04/states-with-the-most-veterans-new-york-alaska/39645251/>), we are the most rural state in the country (<https://bangordailynews.com/2012/03/26/business/census-maine-most-rural-state-in-2010-as-urban-centers-grow-nationwide/>). So my question to you is, why has this taken so long? Is there some doubt in your mind when it comes to supporting our most vulnerable Mainers? Or what about creating long lasting jobs in the strongest economic sector in the state? Is that where the legislature is hung up? Other than genuine apathy, it makes absolutely no sense, especially given the demographics of your constituents, that Mainers in your districts are still struggling to get this basic need met.

I used to volunteer at a day program for adults with developmental disabilities and saw lives upended because of the changes made to Maine's Medicaid transportation program. People who had been receiving support and achieving success at this program for years could suddenly only come intermittently or not at all because they relied on Medicaid transportation. More often than not the group home where a disabled adult lives will only have one vehicle to provide transportation to everyone in the house. Sometimes that's okay and everyone gets their needs met, but sometimes it's not okay and important needs are forced to go unmet. Some folks still live at home with older parents that are no longer able to drive. Others live with family that need to work during the day to support the household and can't drive their disabled loved one to their appointments. And still others have no access to transportation whatsoever because Maine Care forces recipients to stay in poverty in order to access its benefits.

Beyond equitable access to transportation, there needs to be regulated and updated training and wages for those who are working as the drivers. I am a DSP (Direct Support Professional) and I know firsthand that when it comes to the wages and training of workers in the care field, the legislature lets both be awful. When the developmentally disabled woman I support needed Medicaid transportation to participate day program, because both of her parents were working full time, it became very clear very quickly that the drivers had received little, if any training. There were times she would arrive home with no seat belt on, she wouldn't always be assisted out of the vehicle even though she clearly needed it, often drivers didn't understand that she is non-verbal and couldn't speak to them. With all this lack of training, we are incredibly lucky there was never an emergency of some kind. A friend of the woman I support was dropped off all by himself at the right location but at the wrong time. There no program staff, or anyone for that matter, to meet him. The driver called his parents only after they had left to make sure what they had done was okay, which of course it was not and this person was put into an unnecessarily dangerous situation. Again, everyone was incredibly lucky that nothing bad happened. On top of these incidents, having to deal with the brokers after Lepage allowed the privatization of the Medicaid transportation program was an absolute nightmare. All this system does is allow problematic providers to hide behind additional layers of bureaucracy rather than face consequences.

The future of Maine relies on investments in long term supports and services. This bill gives you the opportunity to support vulnerable neighbors and loved ones while creating long term jobs that will support rural communities. Health care makes up 25% of Maine's economy (<https://legislature.maine.gov/doc/3626>), and health care spending is our economic future. By not moving this bill forward, and the others like it, you are dragging us backward.