

*“Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Warren Steward, I am a resident of Millinocket in Penobscot County and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 17.”*

As a parent of two special needs children who don't drive, this bill is a must for rural Maine. Both of my children had or have case management which at one time gave them access to community supports, however as the State continued making cuts, they lost these supports, our children have no transportation to the grocery store, doctors' visits, counseling, etc. as they don't have a car, or drive. Our daughter has a service dog, to perform a variety of tasks for her, including to help calm her. The dog will get her to a quiet place where she can relax by placing his body across her lap, but when she tried to take her dog with her to an appt, she was ridiculed and embarrassed by the bus driver, even though she had paperwork showing that the dog was a trained service dog, and that he performed many services for her. She hasn't ridden the bus since, we had to drive down to her and provide transportation any time that she needed to go anywhere. I would literally drive from Millinocket to Old Town to pick up my daughter and drive her to the grocery store to pick up prescriptions, buy food, and take her anywhere else she needed to go. We had put in for workers to help with things like this, but some of the workers would go shopping for themselves before picking her up to take her shopping. The workers knew her situation and knew she would have to take her dog for her anxiety, but they would still go shopping for themselves and then tell her that the dog couldn't go. While there were other times the workers just did not show up. Due to this she would not get the food, clothing, and other items that she needed unless we took her. I also drive her to all of her appointments including her doctor in Dover Foxcroft which requires me to drive from Millinocket to Old Town to pick her up, drive her to Dover Foxcroft, drive her back to Old Town, and then drive myself back to Millinocket. Penquis would only reimburse mileage once she was in the car, so we had to pay for the gas to Old Town and coming back from Old Town. We are retired and this is an expense that we can't really afford.

With our son, he is much easier as he lives with us, we still have to travel but we have him with us the entire trip down and back for his appointments to Dover. I don't have to travel to pick him up, so when he goes to Dover, it is mostly just time. There are not transportation options available for trips to the grocery store, work, and any other needs he may have in our area. There are adult kids from all ends of the spectrum who need to get to grocery stores, clothing stores, and Medical attention as well.

I am hoping that LD17 fulfills these needs and makes it easier for them to get the help and support they need, because sometimes life is difficult enough. Thank you.