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Lewiston

Testimony SeniorsPlus

To Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

In Favor of LD 17 Resolve, To Expand Nonmedical Transportation Services to the Elderly and Adults with Disabilities Receiving Home and Community Benefits under the MaineCare Program

Delivered in Writing February 10, 2021

Good afternoon Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and members of the committee.

My name is Betsy Sawyer-Manter, and I am the CEO at SeniorsPlus, the Area Agency on Aging in Western Maine. Through our EIM program we are responsible for statewide care coordination serving older adults and adults with disabilities within the long term care system.

I am providing testimony in favor of LD 17.

SeniorsPlus is currently serving over 1277 older and disabled Section 19 people across the entire State of Maine. Our work is to coordinate the plans of care with and for the members. Keep in mind that these 1277 people are living in the community and are nursing home level of care. Currently Section 19 of the MaineCare Benefits Manual allows transportation for medical appointments as a reimbursable service under current rules and regulations only if it is a MaineCare reimbursable medical service. It does not cover transportation for the other covered services that take place outside the home.

Many of the members have plans of care that cover such things as grocery shopping or going to the laundromat. These important and necessary items are considered instrumental activities of daily living. Both are approved under the Personal Support Specialist tasks in the member's plan of care. There is no mechanism currently to reimburse a Personal Support Specialist provider to transport the member so that they may conduct the instrumental activities of daily living.

Most home care providers who employ the Personal Support Specialists do not allow their staff to transport the members as they cannot reimburse staff for travel due to an inability to bill for it under Section 19. In addition, transporting the member is a liability for these providers, and they are no longer willing to transport members. It feels like a hollow plan of care if you have been determined to need a service and it is written into your care plan but have no way to access it without transportation.

Another area of importance related to non-medical transportation pertains to a member not being able to utilize transportation services for other necessary life activities such as vision, hearing, podiatry and dental appointments. Why? Because MaineCare does not cover these services.

Lack of access to transportation limits a person's ability to be in the community and also restricts their independence. Studies have shown that this can lead to social isolation which can lead to depression and a shorter lifespan.

Most aging and disabled people have the goal to remain at home for as long as possible. If Maine people do not have access to home care due to lack of Personal Support Services as the result of the shortage in Maine, and do not have access to transportation to get out into the community to attend important appointments or do their own grocery shopping and laundry, then why are we giving people false hope that they can remain at home?

Thank you.