

## **Testimony Submitted by Jeff Sedlack, Harvard Pilgrim Health Care**

### **In favor of LD 485:**

**An Act To Continue Funding for Home-delivered Meals for Homebound Seniors and To Address Growing Demand**

### **To Joint Standing Committee on Health & Human Services**

### **Submitted in person on March 17, 2021**

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and Members of the Committee- Thank you for including me today and for hearing this bill.

My name is Jeff Sedlack and I am from Falmouth

I am the Medical Director for Maine for Harvard Pilgrim Health Care and have come today to speak strongly in favor of LD485, to give older adults in Maine access and availability to the Meals on Wheels program. I recognize that real budget constraints make it difficult to fund every worthy program aimed at protecting Mainers. However, both the return on investment to health care costs and our responsibility to protect hungry and vulnerable seniors is worth prioritizing this program.

I am a general surgeon, and served in Belfast for six years. For full disclosure, I serve on the Advisory Council of the Southern Maine Area Agency on Aging.

It is well known that underlying social determinants, such as food insecurity, social isolation, transportation or housing insecurity are significant drivers of health care costs.

I've spent the last several years with my practice in Alaska screening patients for Food Insecurity. In our practice we found that, as in Maine, about 20 percent of our patients were food insecure, 5% significantly so – “Doc, I haven't eaten in two days and I don't know where my next meal is coming from” – that's tough to hear. And we needed to have a plan in place for what to do with a “yes.”

Maine is a very cool state that has a remarkable number of programs, such as Let's Go 5210 that are really thought leaders on social determinants. A great

example, SMAAA and Maine Medical Center partnered to study the delivered meals program on people being discharged from the hospital. Among other findings, this Meals on Wheels program was responsible for a 16% reduction in hospital readmissions.

The Meals on Wheels program is a necessary adjunct to care for rural Mainers who face challenges with access to groceries or even to safety net functions, such as food pantries

Meals on Wheels is a very successful program in Maine. It is also critically needed. In the past year, the number of Mainers served has nearly doubled - nearly a million meals to over 10,000 Mainers.

Recognizing that success is a key reason behind my support for LD485. Meals on Wheels is an integral part of the safety net for Mainers. As we continue to improve asking our patients, our members, our families the tough questions, the Meals on Wheels program is a critical part of the “what do I do with a yes?”

And that is why I am here today. A year ago, Harvard Pilgrim funded a pilot study for SMAAA and the Maine Heart Center to work together to keep Mainers with Congestive Heart Failure out of the hospital and leading healthy and productive lives.

We reached out to identified folks, and screened them. We found that 40% of these Mainers qualified for Meals on Wheels and nobody knew it.

I propose that LD485 is critical to funding the increased needs for Meals on Wheels as providers, and families increasingly ask the tough questions and need a response to a “Yes.”

Thank you very much.

**Jeffrey D. Sedlack, MD**

Associate Medical Director, Maine

Harvard Pilgrim Health Care

1 Market Street, 3rd Floor

Portland, ME 04101

(O) (207) 756-6322

[Jeffrey\\_Sedlack@hphc.org](mailto:Jeffrey_Sedlack@hphc.org)

[www.harvardpilgrim.org](http://www.harvardpilgrim.org)