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March 16, 2021

Testimony

In Support of

LD 614 Resolve, To Extend Funding to Maine Veterans' Homes during the COVID-19 Pandemic"

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, Distinguished Members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Will Tuell. I represent the communities of Cutler, East Machias, Eastport, Lubec, Machias, Machiasport, Roque Bluffs, Whiting and Trescott Township. It is my honor to join you today to present LD 614, a **"Resolve, To Extend Funding to Maine Veterans' Homes during the COVID-19 Pandemic"**

LD 614 is a one-time extension of bipartisan legislation sponsored by Sen. Luchini that this committee unanimously passed two years ago which required the Department of Health and Human Services to amend its rules governing MaineCare reimbursement in order to provide cost-based reimbursement to Maine Veterans' Homes nursing facilities.

The bipartisan work needed to get then LD 606 funded in the last biennial budget is both a testament to the impact and commitment to award winning care each of Maine's Veterans Homes from Scarborough to Caribou are committed to providing those who gave the best years of their life serving our country.

As a grandson and nephew of veterans who fought in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam, caring for these men, women, and their families ought to be our highest priority. Maine Veterans Homes is doing so every day, without fanfare, and doing so on a shoestring budget. They are meeting and exceeding their statutorily required mission with honor and dignity, and not asking for much in return.

While Maine Veterans Home is certainly supportive of this bill, and will be testifying in favor of it today, they did not ask for it, and were, upon hearing that I had submitted it, blown away that a legislator not known for supporting extensions to 'one-time funding' in.

During my time in the Legislature I have made great friends at MVH in Machias. The staff, residents, and community that supports our Machias facility is amazing. In many ways, they are like family to me. Myself and Sen. Moore have attended birthday parties, celebrations of life, and other ceremonies there, and make it a point to do so every chance we can.

Representatives Perry and Alley have as well. I have no doubt that the other co-signers on this bill have the same level of commitment to the MVH facilities in their communities. They are not just facilities; they are part of the fabric of the community.

I'm sure by now you are getting the drift that we love and admire Maine Veterans Homes and all that they do. But I am also sure that even with that, you are asking yourself why we are coming back for "one more time" after we had agreed on the original bill.

Two years ago when we pushed for the original legislation, nobody knew a pandemic was knocking at the door. Nobody knew that MVH would be personally, deeply, and irrevocably affected by the ravages of COVID-19. Many lives were lost. Staff, residents, and their families lives were changed in ways nobody saw coming. MVH responded to those challenges, and continues to do so even today as we slowly recover from a virus that has conservatively killed upwards of half a million people.

We believe this funding is essential to helping MVH respond to, and recover from, the COVID-19 pandemic. We also believe that losing \$2 million a year would result in staff cuts and facility closures in rural areas where the cost of providing quality care is higher. And we believe that preserving this funding for two more years will give MVH the time it needs to develop other funding sources and get on a stronger footing, while carefully and compassionately responding to the needs of our community.

I would gladly invite your questions, however I also would encourage you to discuss this in greater depth with the Maine Veterans Home staff who have signed up to testify today. Their stories of navigating the pandemic, doing so on a tight budget, and all the while repeatedly fulfilling their obligation to the Legislature, are sobering and inspiring.

It is with that that I wholeheartedly and enthusiastically recommend a unanimous ought to pass decision during the work session, and look forward to taking the case to the full body, and ultimately appropriations if it is successful there.

Thank you all!