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**Testimony in Support for LD 1624, Resolve, To Create a Stakeholder Group To Identify the Needs of Long-term Care Family Caregivers.**

Good morning, Chairs Claxton and Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Rosalyn Fisher from Bangor, and I am a volunteer for AARP Maine. AARP is the nation's largest nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to empowering people 50 and older to choose how they live as they age. On behalf of our more than 200,000 members statewide, thank you for the opportunity to share testimony with you today.

Today, I am testifying in support of LD 1624.

On December 27, 2010 my husband, Bob, became dependent, and I became a caregiver. After a joyful Christmas at our house in Georgetown, Texas, with family from Golden, Colorado and Ft. Worth, Texas, I found my husband in bed, unable to speak, and with a facial droop. I knew he had had a stroke and called 911. In the E.R. the neurologist told me to call the family. He did not expect Bob to live. The stroke affected the area of the brain that controls swallow and speech and also the area for his vision. After Bob failed a swallow study but was able to walk, he was sent to a rehab center 36 hours after his admission. I had stayed with him, our Ft. Worth family came back, and our Colorado family stayed longer.

Medicare allows 21 days in rehab for a stroke, and Bob was discharged after 20 days. He said he had never exercised so much in his life. P.T., speech therapy, and occupational therapy. I was with him every day. As a retired occupational therapist, my role as a caregiver was to encourage him and help with his exercises. One day he told me, "Stop being a therapist. Just be a wife." I went home and cried.

Bob had always worked in the yard he designed, grew herbs and native plants and fixed anything that was not working. After retiring from Lennox Heating and Air Conditioning, he enjoyed doing home maintenance for property owners. He always helped with household chores such as laundry. His love of nature led him to be a volunteer park ranger. Together we traveled, enjoyed theatre, and trying new restaurants. After his stroke, he could not drive, was not able to read, and was easily upset and frustrated. His swallow improved, but there were many foods he could not eat. He wanted a battery-operated three-wheel bike and his Colorado

son found one on Craigslist that was in San Antonio. A friend took him to get the bike and I bought him a helmet. I have a picture of him smiling when he rode his bike. The bike gave him a little independence.

Because he took the blood thinner Coumadin, his blood had to be checked frequently and a volunteer from a faith-based group was able to take him to those appointments. I took him to all the doctors appointments and to outpatient speech therapy. I bought a Lifeline pendant for him to wear when I needed to run errands. I told him that was for my benefit. I stopped all the volunteer activities I had done since retiring, but was able to walk with a friend in the neighborhood.

We joined a group for survivors of stroke, SOS, where both of us received support. I also received support from a Stephen Minister and members of our church and friends.

Bob practiced his speech exercises but never regained normal speech. In August, 2011, I made plans to be in Maine with my daughter who was having health problems and Bob's kids were glad to come and take care of him. While I was gone for nine days, they took him to the E.R. three times. When I got home, my stepdaughter said he told her that I had said I would put him in a nursing home. This was not true, but he was frightened when I was gone. After another hospitalization, I started investigating hospice services as I could see his health declining. At the end of September I called hospice and he lived until Oct. 5<sup>th</sup>. I knew I could not care for him myself any longer. Both his oldest and youngest sons came to help us. I could do days, but not nights and days.

I have no regrets about being my husband's caregiver, but I know that the responsibility takes a toll both physically and emotionally.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. As a volunteer with AARP Maine, I respectfully ask you to vote in favor of LD 1624.

Thank you,

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