



**Testimony of Nathan Miller, Senior Program Director Spectrum Generations (the Central Maine Area Agency on Aging) a resident of Turner, ME**

**To Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services**

**In Favor of H.P. 296 – An Act to Create the Family Caregiver Grant Pilot Program**

**Delivered 5/20/21**

Thank you, Senate Chair Claxton and House Chair Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services for this opportunity today to bring attention the importance of Family Caregivers. My name is Nathan Miller, Senior Program Director of Spectrum Generations, one of Maine’s Area Agencies on Aging. Spectrum Generations provides various levels of support to older adults, adults with disabilities and family caregivers across communities in Central Maine.

The January 2020 Commission to Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues found that Mainers have **11,702 unstaffed hours of approved service per week** and an additional 2,618 individuals waiting for services all together. The commission goes on to state that, “when no long-term services and supports are available at all, some individuals end up essentially living in hospitals after the medical crisis or event that sent the person there in the first place.” When this happens, it is our tax dollars that support this placement.

There are various factors that contribute to this situation. Personal Support Specialist reimbursement rates are one of those factors, but this is not problem that we can buy our way out of. Maine has the highest percentage of people 60 years old or older than any other state.<sup>1</sup> This means we have a limited corresponding percentage of working age Mainers able to provide older adults with necessary goods and services. We don’t have the workers to support our older adults and consequently these population dynamics force family caregivers to become the cornerstone of our long-term services and support system.

**Family caregivers are filling in for home care workers and preventing institutionalizations.** In these ways they are saving tax revenue. Maine Beacon reported that, “in 2017, approximately 181,000 family caregivers in Maine provided an estimated 152 million hours of care. Those unpaid hours are worth \$2.2 billion annually”.<sup>2</sup> Some may view family caregiving as their responsibility, and they themselves may view it that way, but it is not. They have no financial

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey. Table DP05: ACS demographics and housing estimates. Accessed March 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Beacon, <https://mainebeacon.com/maine-family-caregivers-do-2-2-billion-in-unpaid-work/#:~:text=The%20amount%20of%20unpaid%20work,are%20worth%20%242.2%20billion%20annually,> December 2, 2019.

obligation and the vast majority have no legal obligation. So, if it is not our responsibility to encourage and support them, it is at least clearly in our benefit. Our benefit to not only encourage and support, but also to strengthen and broaden this facet of our long-term services and supports continuum. To at least give family caregivers what they need to continue caregiving.

To help inform the 2020-2024 Maine State Plan on Aging the Muskie School completed a needs assessment and the top need identified was respite services for family caregivers. They are asking for help. A “family caregiver grant” can be the means by which family caregivers get respite or other resources they identify as needed to help them to keep their person safe and living at home.

In the Maine State Plan on Aging the first goal is to: ‘Support older Mainers and their care partners to remain active and healthy in their communities of choice’. LD 296 is the vehicle in which Maine can make progress toward this goal.

I urge you to vote in favor of LD 296 to show family caregivers that Maine values their contributions and will support them in their choice to be a family caregiver.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.