

Shaun Donnelly  
Arundel

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Shaun Donnelly, I am a resident of Arundel and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 296.

You've heard and will continue to hear testimony from countless Mainers who care for their loved ones. I'm here to tell you about the emotional toll that takes on them, because too often this work means they use all their energy caring for others instead of themselves.

My wife Amy spends 15-20 hours a week helping her 98-year-old grandmother Eva. This involves not just obvious tasks like assisting with eye drops and preparing meals, but also keeping her calendar, making sure she sees her friends, doesn't stay out in the sun for too long, and countless other details to track. The mental energy it takes is enormous.

When Eva's doctor told her she could no longer consume thin liquids, Amy had to not only break the news to her that this meant no more morning coffee, but rethink all her meals. Soup is one of Eva's favorite foods, but now anything with thin broth is a health risk for her. And for anything she prepares, she must be sure it isn't too dry, because Eva can no longer drink water while she eats. It took months of trial and error and frustration to adapt to this new normal.

The usual stresses of keeping Eva safe and healthy redoubled during the pandemic. She went months without seeing anyone outside our home. While we all made the best that we could, the effects of prolonged isolation strained all our interactions. I didn't realize just how much until one morning I came downstairs to find Amy sobbing in our office. She had finally gotten the call back from Maine Health to schedule Eva's COVID vaccine, only to have the call drop out shortly after the operator picked up the line. In a moment, she went from pure joy to panicked tears having lost her hope for relief to a bad phone connection. It was almost another month until we were able to get her a first shot.

Thankfully there are many more good days than bad. But inevitably the daily hardships and worry catch up and it can be overwhelming. Amy wonders if she's doing enough, not sure whether she's capable of giving more, and feeling inadequate. Meanwhile Eva struggles with her slowly losing more of her independence and worrying her own life has become her granddaughter's burden, and you can begin to imagine how emotionally fraying things can be.

Amy's is one story out of the thousands of Mainers who take on this stressful, emotionally taxing work of caregiving. We are all grateful because it allows Eva to continue to live a mostly normal life at home, but they deserve more than gratitude. This bill is a way to show them that all of Maine sees them and recognizes their value. I urge you to pass LD 296.