

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of LD 296, “An Act To Provide a Tax Credit for Family Caregivers”.

My name is Kathryn Harnish, and I live in Houlton. As the primary caregiver for my 77-year-old mother and a UNE social work student with an interest in Maine’s aging population, I know firsthand the challenges of providing long-term supports for older family members. Caring for my mother’s health and personal needs is a privilege and I cherish the time I spend with her, but it is also incredibly taxing – both physically and emotionally. I’m fortunate that I have a terrific support system around me, folks who make sure that I’m taking time to care for myself, but it’s still exhausting work that, when combined with my other responsibilities, leaves me drained by the end of the day.

In my field placement with Aroostook Agency on Aging, I’ve worked closely with family caregivers through several training programs and virtual support groups. One of the consistent themes in those forums is the vital need for occasional respite care. Being able to step away, even briefly, from caregiving responsibilities to recharge body and mind is absolutely essential to caregiver well-being. And it is our well-being that helps provide for the well-being of our elders and their ability to stay in their homes and communities.

*Each week*, more than [10,000 hours of approved personal support care already go undelivered](#) in Maine, and more than 500 older adults receive no care at all, despite the fact that most are nursing-home eligible. Maine’s long-term care services would be simply overwhelmed without the [152 million hours of care](#) that family members provide to their loved ones each year.

In Maine, [181,000 family members deliver more than \\$2.2 billion in unpaid care](#) to older adults and persons with disabilities. More than [60% of these individuals are balancing paid work](#) with caregiving, increasing the level of financial and emotional strain they experience. [Seventy percent of my fellow caregivers](#) report work-related difficulties as a result of their caregiving responsibilities, with 15% taking a leave of absence, 14% reducing hours, and 6% leaving the workforce entirely.

I’m grateful to Representative Cloutier for advancing LD 296, which provides much-needed respite services or tax credits to family caregivers. Her recognition of and support for family caregivers, which have become health, economic, and social imperatives here in Maine, are most welcome. And while we certainly need even more caregiving supports to ensure healthy aging as our population grows older, this is an important first step for the tens of thousands of Mainers who work hard to care for our loved ones. Please join me in supporting LD 296.

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