



**Testimony of Robert Belanger on Behalf of  
The Maine Council on Aging  
To Joint Standing Committee on Health & Human Services  
In Favor of LD 296 -- An Act to Create the Family Caregiver Grant  
Pilot Program**

Delivered in Person on May 18, 2021

Greetings Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health & Human Services:

My name is Robert Belanger, and I am a MSW Student Intern at Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). This is the first time I'm providing testimony in front of a legislative committee. The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of nearly 100 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older community members working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged, and secure lives as we age in our homes and communities. I am testifying in support of LD 296.

There are an estimated 181,000 informal family caregivers in Maine. These are spouses, children, grandchildren, and other relatives caring for aging and disabled adults who have difficulty living independently. Many of these caregivers are caring for the more than 37,000 people in Maine who are living with some form of dementia. Annually Maine family caregivers deliver about 152 million hours of unpaid support and care to their family members. Many of these family caregivers are already have low incomes and do not have extra funds to pay for home care or respite care.

Informal family caregivers are quite literally the backbone of the long-term care system – without them, our system of caring for aging and disabled adults would fall apart. Without them, it is estimated that Maine would have to spend \$2.2 billion annually to provide the same level of care.

There's an equity issue here as well, concerning women caregivers. Women make up about two-thirds of all family caregivers in the United States. They are more likely to take less demanding jobs and lose job-related income and benefits due to providing care for a relative. Women caregivers are 2.5 times more likely to live in poverty in their old age because they took care of their parents or older relatives.

Creating this pilot grant program will support family caregivers who do not qualify for other support and help us understand what the demand is for this kind of a grant program in Maine. Family caregivers would receive up to \$2000 to support their respite and care needs. If a person needs 8 hours of home care per week, it can cost about \$10,400. This \$2,000 will go a long way to helping low income people afford this care and to remain in the workforce. These grants also value the contributions of informal caregivers.

Although the \$2,000 grant is still small in comparison to the actual costs and long-term lost income a family caregiver may incur, it is a step in the right direction, and it comes at a critically important time.

As people in need of support are finding it increasingly difficult to find paid support workers, they are turning to family members for help. We want to encourage families to care for older and disabled adults who can no longer live fully independently. We also want to ensure that Maine's employed caregivers remain active in our shrinking workforce for as long as possible. For all of these reasons, it's important that we take this step now.

I urge you to vote in favor of LD 296 to demonstrate to family caregivers that Maine values their contributions.

Thank you. I'd be happy to take any questions you may have.