



Testimony in Support of LD 1451

An Act to Strengthen Coordination of Community Transportation

Provided by: Sue Mackey Andrews

April 17, 2025

Dear Senator Nangle, Representative Crafts, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation,

My name is Sue Mackey Andrews, and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of *Helping Hands with Heart*, a long-standing community coalition serving Piscataquis County. For more than 25 years, our members have come together around a shared commitment: to support the health, dignity, and well-being of every person in our Maine Highlands region. We write today in strong support of LD 1451, because transportation remains one of the most persistent and preventable barriers our neighbors face.

Helping Hands with Heart (HHH) is the regional “hub” for the Maine Highlands, helping local residents to access available services and address real emergencies that occur in our very rural area on nearly a daily basis. I am attaching a copy of our brochure which I hope explains our work. Our county has no state services within our borders, and about 50% lack access to the Internet which further limits their access to services for which they might be eligible. Transportation is historically our #1 cited need by area residents. As I am sure you know, Piscataquis County is one of 812 “Frontier” counties in the US - one of only two east of the Mississippi. A Frontier County is one that is fewer than 6 persons/square mile. Transportation within the county can be challenging; going out of the county is even more so.

We work closely with regional providers on a weekly basis to ensure that our residents’ needs are met, and to also address those “unmet needs” where we can. These needs range from food, fuel, housing repairs, car repairs, medication co-payments, assistance to complete applications for services, and supporting the homeless in our region. We do this with grant and personal contributions, with no paid staff. We are entirely volunteer and average 6-8 referrals per week.

In Piscataquis County, reliable transportation is essential for accessing medical care, groceries, employment, and other daily needs. Our residents often travel long distances to reach these services; some as long as 1 ½ hours one way. More than one-third of primary care visits in Piscataquis County require travel over 30 miles, compared to a statewide average of 20% (Northern Light Health, 2022 Shared CHNA Report).

Households in Piscataquis County spend an average of 36% of their income on transportation, the highest percentage in the state ([Moving Maine Network, Barriers Report, 2025](#)). That burden limits choices, isolates communities, and makes it even harder for families to build long-term stability. It's no surprise that in the county's most recent health needs assessment, transportation was identified as one of the top priorities for improving access to care (Maine Shared CHNA, *Piscataquis County Health Profile*, 2025).

Penquis, our regional transportation partner, offers both public transportation services and Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NET) for MaineCare-covered appointments. They also coordinate a network of volunteer drivers, which makes a real difference. But even with these essential services, gaps remain. It isn't always practical for employment or flexible enough for day-to-day needs. These are the kinds of stories we hear every week through our coalition of real people, doing their best, but facing a barrier they can't overcome alone.

This is especially true for our neighbors who are in substance use recovery treatment, many of whom travel to Bangor or other urban areas for MAT daily or weekly, and only can get there with the support of Penquis.

LD 1451 moves Maine toward a more connected, coordinated transportation system—one that reflects the real needs of rural communities like ours. By establishing regional Mobility Management Hubs and improving coordination across agencies, the bill helps us reduce duplication, strengthen what already works, and fill in the gaps we've known for years.

This kind of structure strengthens local solutions by providing the coordination and flexibility communities need to do even more. It makes it easier for rural areas to braid funding streams, coordinate volunteer efforts, and design flexible transportation that works in places where neighbors are often separated by many miles.

For those of us who have worked in partnership with our communities for decades, this is the kind of approach we fully support, one that is practical, people-centered, and built on collaboration. We are too small in population, and often referred to as the "oldest, poorest, sickest" county in Maine - all of which is true and very real. About 30% of our total population are over age 65; with another 20% under 65 qualified as disabled.

We are grateful for your attention to this issue and for your understanding that access to transportation is foundational to health, to employment, to connection, and to the full dignity of life in Maine's rural communities. On behalf of Helping Hands with Heart and the many voices we represent across Piscataquis County, I respectfully encourage your support for LD 1451.

I want to close by thanking each of you, sincerely, for serving in our Legislature at these challenging times. Your leadership and advocacy for the underserved corners of our state is sorely needed and immensely valued.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Sue".

Sue Mackey Andrews
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Piscataquis County, Maine