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Committee on Armed Services

Committee on Small Business

Chairman, Subcommittee on Contracting  
and Infrastructure

**Jared Golden**  
Congress of the United States  
2nd District of Maine

March 22, 2021

Senator Louis Luchini  
Representative Chris Caiazzo  
Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs  
c/o Legislative Information Office  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

Dear Sen. Luchini and Rep. Caiazzo,

I am writing to testify today in support of LD 693, An Act to Make the Pilot Program Providing Mental Health Case Management Services to Veterans a Permanent Program.

I would like to thank Representative Roberts for sponsoring this bill and for her commitment to supporting veterans in Maine. I know that many other veterans and veteran organizations appreciate the effort she puts into supporting veterans in her district and all over the state.

This committee helped to create this program back in 2017. I sponsored the legislation, but it could not have been successful without support from a lot of other great folks that I served with in Augusta, including all three of the current senators serving on this committee, Senator Luchini, Senator Farrin, and Senator Hickman -- at the time they were members of the House, and Louie was the House Chair.

Former Maine DHHS Commissioner Mary Mayhew also played a big supporting role, and her staff provided technical assistance for the drafting of the amendment that was adopted and passed into law. The former Director of the Maine Bureau of Veterans Services, Adria Horn, also played a key role in developing the concept for the program. It's also worth noting that the enacting legislation received the unanimous support of the entire House and Senate. This was a bipartisan effort all around.

The impetus behind this started in motion in early 2015, at a meeting of veterans with local legislators. A handful of Afghanistan and Iraq war veterans attended, and they were pretty worked up about the lack of mental health services in Maine. One guy stood up and gave the whole room a good piece of his mind. That got my attention. His name is Matt Jabaut, and he's still fighting hard for veterans in Maine today as the State Commander of the American Legion.

Matt and those other veterans pointed out that veterans struggling with substance use and mental health challenges were having to go to Massachusetts or even further away to get inpatient care from the VA. It

seemed pretty obvious to them that there was a need for inpatient treatment beds in Maine. Over the next few years, they tried to put pressure on the VA about this problem but didn't have much success.

But this committee did listen to the voices of these veterans, and the program this bill seeks to make permanent was created in response. Put simply, the Legislature created this program to get help to veterans before they ended up in such a crisis that they were in need of inpatient treatment.

If the committee looks at the data available from the Maine Bureau of Veterans Services and the American Legion, you will see that the program has been effective in helping a lot of veterans. Unfortunately, the need for the program still exists. [In June, 2019, I wrote to the VA](#) about the ongoing lack of mental health resources available to Maine veterans and in response the VA conducted an analysis of the need for substance use and associated mental health treatment for veterans in Maine. The result of that analysis demonstrated to the VA what that group of veterans told a roomful of Maine lawmakers seven years ago in 2015, and that is why Senator Collins, Senator King, and Congresswoman Pingree joined me in August, 2019 [to support VA Maine's request](#) for an inpatient treatment program at TOGUS. In September, 2020, the VA announced that it will break ground on a [24-bed inpatient substance use and mental health treatment unit at TOGUS](#) later this year with a goal of making those services available in 2022.

That is a real victory for Maine veterans, however, it remains true that it is far better to get assistance to a veteran before they end up in a crisis that requires inpatient care. With this bill, the committee has an opportunity to do just that, and for those veterans who do end up needing that care at TOGUS, this program can be there to help them when they transition out.

This program probably should have made it into the budget request, but you know the old saying about presenting and dispensing. The committee has a good opportunity to do more bipartisan work on behalf of Maine veterans by getting behind Rep. Roberts' effort, supporting this bill through both chambers, and making a strong case for it in appropriations. This one shouldn't die on the table.

Respectfully,



Jared Golden

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