

Good afternoon Senator Hickman, Representative Caiazzo and distinguished members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee. I'm Representative Sue Bernard of District 149 which includes Caribou... and I'm here to testify on LD 2001.

Since learning of the closure decision just last week, I've spoken to the CEO of the Maine Veterans Home, the CEO of Cary Medical Center, numerous Caribou city officials, businesses, other area nursing homes and most importantly, Veterans and their families. The parts of the problem everyone seems to agree on are... this decision will have a devastating ripple effect on the entire community, wish we had known the depth of the problem earlier, and the communication surrounding the closure decision was less than adequate—but that's looking backward. I'm far more interested in looking forward.

In the interest of full disclosure, I'm not only the Representative for Caribou, I'm the daughter of a WWII veteran, the wife of a veteran and all my brothers-in-law are veterans, so this issue hits not just close to home; but actually in my home. My father-in-law had the blessing of living his final months and days at the Maine Veterans home in Caribou after living with my husband and me for a time. So, I'm here to back the spirit of the bill and I will work with legislators, the Governor, the congressional delegation and perhaps most importantly, the community. While this region is very worried about the choices left for our beloved veterans, I believe in the can-do, roll-up-your-sleeves attitude of Caribou, the surrounding area and Cary Medical Center. Are there possible opportunities for the veterans population and other seniors, IF the communities are given the time to explore them? We know that Maine has the oldest population in the nation at over 20% of people over 65, so homes for seniors will continue to be needed.

I hope this committee will scrutinize both the short and long-term impact of the bill before you and the funding request attached. I trust that you will consider the realities: that the Maine Veterans home is a 501c(3) private non-profit...and be cognizant of unintended consequences—while we may approve of legislative oversight of this entity, how much government control do we want of ANY non-profit. I'll be anxious to hear the committee's deliberations.

I'm sure you'll have the opportunity to hear the serious nature of the financial problem and compare it to funds available, please look at every possible avenue, remembering that apparently this is not only a financial problem, but also a workforce and population challenge.

In short, I hope to work on a real path forward to find lasting, safe and supportive long-term care for our brave, devoted veterans.

Thank you for your time.

Representative Susan Bernard
Caribou
LD 2001

I chose "neither for nor against" at the advice of Senator Hickman. I fully support the intent and spirit of the bill, but have concerns that it may not be the best answer to this serious problem.