

Lucas Cooper
Caribou
LD 2001

Good afternoon Senate President Jackson and to the committee. My name is Lucas Cooper from Caribou, Maine and I am currently employed as a Certified Nursing Assistant at Maine Veteran's Homes-Caribou. I am here to voice my support of Legislative Document number 2001 providing funding and supporting the Maine Veteran's Homes in Caribou and Machias. My journey with MVH first began March of 2019 when I signed on to take their "learn as you earn" course where you learned how to become a CNA while also gaining invaluable experience and on the job training. After completing the program and earning my certificate, I began to work on the skilled care side and form many bonds with the residents. I learned quickly that it's more than just washing, feeding, and changing these people. It's about being there for them when no one else is. It's about being their family when their real family can't always come to visit. And for two years I made it my personal mission to care the best I can for our vets as I was born into a military family and have unique insight into the veteran community that many others might not. For a brief moment (June 2021-December 2021) I left MVH-C to work elsewhere and broaden my professional skill set. But I found myself missing the familiarity and camaraderie I had at the vets home. So I decided to apply back and being rehired there was one of the best choices I made in a long time. But now all of a sudden this place is in grave danger of being shut down? Many of our residents and their families are county born and raised and the closest MVH home is in Bangor. That's 170 plus mile car ride. And in the winter when roads are horrible you might as well just cancel your plans. Not to mention the hardships many of our residents face from not being able to visit regularly with friends and family. And to add a three-four hour plus car ride to visit? What toll would that exact on the residents of both facilities? A heavy one to say the least. That's not even mentioning the cost of moving them to a whole new home, cost of care at the new facility, and so many other things that just speak so loudly about the absurdity of closing down two of the only homes who can truly cater to the rural veterans that live there. And not to mention what this will do to the staff there. Our morale is at an all time low. In Caribou alone we have 33 residents on our Skilled Nursing Unit and 24 on the Residential unit of which my grandfather was a resident on years ago. 76 dedicated, hard working and compassionate employees who have put their lives on hold for the last two years while we've held the line against this pandemic that will be out of a job due to our callous leadership. And let's not forget our sister facility in Machias with their 23 residents and 49 staff. To attempt to place all of them now like this would not only be kicking them out of their homes, it would also mean backing up our hospitals and nursing homes who are already dangerously stretched thin. That's why I'm voicing my support for this bill and I hope that it comes to pass. Thank you all for your time. God bless.