



Testimony to the Committee On Veterans and Legal Affairs

March 2, 2022

Mr. Chairman and members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Debra Couture, I am the Commander of The American Legion Department of Maine.

The American Legion is vehemently opposed to the closure of the Maine Veterans Homes (MVH) in Caribou and Machias. This closure affects a third (two out of six) Maine Veterans Homes in the State. These closures will affect the most vulnerable of Maine's Veteran populations.

Along with The American Legion, all four members of Congress, as well as the current and past Governors of our State have appealed to the Maine Veterans Home board to rethink this abhorrent decision and its cascading negative effects on our elderly and disabled veteran population.

Every effort must be made to ensure continued funding, and adequate staffing of these vital facilities; especially given the lack of options for all seniors in Maine; and in Aroostook and Washington Counties in particular. The Caribou MVH has provided assisted living/residential care, long term care, short term skilled nursing care, rehabilitation, therapy, and dementia and memory care and respite care since its opening in 1990. The Machias MVH has provided assisted living and residential care and dementia and memory care since 2005. These services are vital to our veterans in these two counties.

Authorized by the Legislature in 1977, with the first home having been built in Augusta in 1983, according to its website, "MVH has a special role to promote and improve Veterans' long term health care benefits. MVH will serve as a bridge between Veterans and various organizations to create access to affordable and appropriate long-term care and rehabilitative services, both directly and through cooperative relationships." In the eyes of The American Legion Department of Maine, the closing of these two homes does not meet this commitment.

The time for talking has passed, it is time for the MVH Board, the Federal Government (VA), the Legislature of the State of Maine (DHHS and DVEM) to put their collective heads together and determine how these vital homes will remain open and operational.

As we say in the military "Deeds not words." Now is not the time to break faith with those who served from WWII through Post 9-11 operations. We, the veterans, stepped up to serve our country and citizens. Now it is time for the MVH Board, the State of Maine, and the VA to do the same. It is the right thing to do.

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