

**Testimony of Douglas A. Farnham, Commissioner, Department of Defense, Veterans and
Emergency Management**

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON VETERANS AND LEGAL
AFFAIRS**

**“An Act To Fund and Support the Veterans Homes in Caribou and Machias and Require
Legislative Approval for the Establishment and Closure of Veterans Homes”**

March 2, 2022

Senator Hickman, Representative Caiazzo, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Veterans and Legal Affairs, I am here today to testify in support of the goals of LD 2001.

Service in the U.S. Armed Forces has always been important in Maine; our state has one of the highest percentages per capita in the country of veterans in our population. Maine has also always been a leader in providing care to our veterans. The first VA hospital in the country was opened here at Togus. The first VA Community Based Outpatient Clinic (CBOC) in the country was opened in Caribou.

The network of Veterans' Homes in Maine delivers on our nation's promise to veterans that we will stand by them, just as they have stood by us, and these homes have been exceedingly important to that effort by supporting our former service members, and their families, and ensuring they receive the appropriate care and dignity they deserve. A decision to open or close a Veterans' Home impacts many generations of veterans and their families. The issues affecting such decisions should include an opportunity for all interested parties to share their concerns, ideas, and alternative suggestions. And certainly no closure should happen in the span of less than three months.

The Maine Veterans' Home in Caribou is home to thirty-five veterans and twenty-two spouses and the Machias facility is home to sixteen veterans and seven spouses. These veterans and their spouses deserve the best available care at a facility nearby their families and the communities they call home. These homes are in areas that have very few community alternatives to the veterans' home where they currently live. Accessing resources in these areas has always been hard and it was no doubt a chief reason that the homes were located there in the first place. Economic feasibility in these areas was a secondary consideration when the decision was made to construct the homes.

The Board of Trustees for the Maine Veterans' Homes are all unpaid volunteers, and they are all veterans. I have no doubt that they are acting in good faith and making the decisions they believe are in the best interests of the present and future residents in the homes.

But we believe that the Board would benefit from additional time and information to help inform a decision of this magnitude. We are willing to work closely with Maine Veterans' Homes leadership and the Board and are willing to invest to make these locations viable in the short run until long term solutions on the future of these homes can be reached. We can also convene other agencies, as well as the Maine Congressional delegation, that may present other solutions to this problem.

We believe there is an opportunity, working closely with Senator Jackson, whom we applaud for putting forward this legislation, and the Maine Veterans' Homes leadership and its Board, to find a path forward to protect the interests of our veterans and keep these homes open.

Thank you and thanks to all of the members of this committee for your commitment to serving the veterans of Maine.