

Senator Hickman and Representative Caiazzo, members of the Veterans and Legal Affairs Committee: thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Joe Michaud and I am speaking on behalf of the American Legion, Department of Maine. The American Legion like other Veterans leaders here today speak with one voice in support of LD 2001. When we heard about the decision of the Maine Veterans Homes Board of Directors to close the Veterans homes in Caribou and Machias we came out against the decision. Veterans in rural communities, like many Mainer's, are aging and are in need of these facilities. In Aroostook County we have more than 5,000 Veterans, 2400 of whom our from the Vietnam era now in their 70s, 80s, and beyond. Furthermore we have Veterans from Korea, and from more recent wars that will need the services provided by the Maine Veterans Homes, some today and many tomorrow. I have learned that the Caribou Maine Veterans Home is at roughly 81% full compared to the numbers in the rest of the state which is roughly 56%.

There are many reasons why the nursing homes in Caribou and Washington County are so critical. Closing these homes will impact many families who provide daily support to residents of the homes. Spouses who are living alone will be forced to travel for hours to get to visit their loved one if

they are transferred to another Veterans Home in Augusta or elsewhere. Maine is a huge state and having homes located in our rural Counties is so important.

Nursing home beds are hard to come by, there is a shortage. The decision to close the homes does not provide enough time to resettle the residents.

Relocating residents will be traumatic for them and their families. Our Veterans came to the aid of our nation when they were called. Many did not return home, many returned home permanently changed due to PTSD, injuries of war and others returned counting on the promise made to them, that the Veteran and his family would be taken care of in thanks for their service. The American Legion, Department of Maine stands with all of our Veterans, their families and communities in support of LD 2001 and we will fight to keep the Veterans Homes in Caribou and Machias open. Thankyou.