



**Testimony of Jess Maurer on Behalf of
The Maine Council on Aging
To Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government**

**In Favor of LD 301 – An Act To Help Older Adults Age in
Place through Comprehensive Planning**

Submitted in Person on February 25, 2019

Senator Claxton, Representative Martin and members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government:

My name is Jess Maurer and I'm the Executive Director of the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of more than 75 organizations, businesses and older community members working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age at home and in community settings. I am testifying in support of LD 301.

Every new era comes with opportunities and challenges. Mainers have been able to overcome these challenges in favor of the opportunities every time, and will, no doubt, do it again as we enter what's been dubbed "the Longevity Era". The opportunities that come with healthy, long life are pretty exciting. Conversely, the challenges that come with evolving systems to meet the changing needs of an older population can seem daunting. However, if we engage these challenges with careful study and planning with an eye to capitalizing on the opportunities, we will be able to build a stronger Maine, full of people who are contributing fully long into old age.

The good news is, Mainers are living longer than ever before. With a relatively healthy older population, older adults are remaining active in our workforce, leading civic and social organizations, and developing into an impressive volunteer corp. The challenging news is that we haven't systematically planned, at any level – municipal, regional or state, to accommodate the changing needs of an older population that is intent on aging at home. This means that, far too often, older adults find they can no longer live in their homes, but that there is nowhere they can go in their community or region that can accommodate their needs at a price they can afford.

For context, here are some demographic reasons why we need to act now to plan to address the changing needs of older Mainers:

- About 24,000 people are turning 65 each year in Maine; 25% of people 65+ are projected to need more than one year of paid support that Medicare doesn't cover;
- About a third of the 250,000 Mainers who are 65 or older live on social security alone, with an average income of about \$14,000;

- Currently, about 75,000 Mainers age 65+ are living in “the gap” – meaning they do not have enough income to meet their basic expenses but don’t qualify for any means-tested benefits;
- About 10,000 older adults are waiting to access affordable senior housing and the wait is between 3 to 5 years; MaineHousing is building about 250 units a year.

In short, tens of thousands of older Mainers will need to access home repair, affordable housing, transportation, help with chores and all kinds of care, but will not qualify for assistance and will not be able to afford the services they need. While the state will need to do its part to formally address these challenges through long term care reform and investments in housing and transportation services, municipalities and volunteers will also have a big role to play.

This is why we need town planners to get involved. Older adults will need to remain in homes that no longer work for them. Homes will need to be modified – either to help the person live safely or to allow others to move in and help. New models of senior housing and assisted living need to be developed and sited in downtowns where older adults can fully engage in community life and walk to the services they need. Regional transportation partnerships with volunteer networks need to form to deliver transportation in ways that accommodate older adults. Given the complexity of these issues, comprehensive planning offers the perfect mechanism to systematically assess and plan to meet the needs of older residents.

We are not asking you to mandate towns to take this step. Many of the purposes listed in the comprehensive planning statute are for “encouragement” as this one is. This is because every community is different and the comprehensive planning statute offers guidance on many issues that a community should consider. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to building communities that work for a lifetime.

This bill is still necessary even though nearly a quarter of Maine’s towns and cities are already actively engaged in assessing and addressing the needs of their older residents. Some are doing this as part of comprehensive planning and some are doing it outside of comprehensive planning. The bill is needed because three quarters of municipalities are not actively engaged in this work. The changes to the comprehensive planning laws as proposed in LD 301 will prompt municipal planners engaged in comprehensive planning to investigate the changing needs of their older residents and to connect to tools, models and innovations that can address these needs.

We are also not asking towns and cities to do this work on their own. There are many well-established tools and models available to municipalities engaging in this work. AARP Maine provides direct support to municipalities who want to join the national AARP Network of Age Friendly Communities. The MCOA hosts the Tri-State Learning Collaborative on Aging, a shared learning platform that includes publicly available assessment and planning tools that have been successfully used in Maine and Northern New England. In addition, we have just convened the Task Force on Healthy Aging in Communities to create a plan to support municipalities in understanding and addressing the needs of older residents. All of these efforts will help municipalities identify ways they can help older residents live healthy, engaged and secure lives.

For these reasons, we urge you to pass LD 301.

Thank you.