



**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 1733 – An Act To Ensure Comprehensive
Interdepartmental Planning, Coordination and Collaboration on
Aging Policy**

Submitted in Person on January 29, 2020

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 95 organizations, businesses, municipalities 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 1733.

Maine has an incredible opportunity to lead the nation in building new systems that take full advantage of the Longevity Era. Just a century ago, our life expectancy was less than 40 years. Today, the average life expectancy in the United States is 76, and that's just average. As we know, older people are now being active, engaged, and productive long into their 80s, 90s and even 100s! However, the systems we rely on daily to live engaged, productive lives don't always work for us as our abilities and finances change as we age. With vision and an innovative spirit, we can modify these systems to help people remain as engaged and productive as they can be long into old age.

As we age, we touch almost every aspect of life there is. Aging isn't just about "health" and needing "services" it's also about work, creativity, and volunteerism. It's about farming and lobstering, teaching and learning, legislating and governing. How well we age is dependent upon how well our housing meets our physical needs, whether we can still engage fully in all aspects of life when we can no longer drive, whether we have access to lifelong learning opportunities, how well our communities are planned, and whether we can still earn a living to supplement our retirement savings. It also depends upon whether we can use new tools to assist us in our work, play, and in everyday life.

In Maine, each year we have about 12,500 babies born while at the same time about 24,000 people turn 65. For decades, we've rightly focused on making sure our kids grow up healthy and ready to take the jobs of Maine's future. That's one of the reasons Maine's Children's Cabinet was created "to promote and support active, vigorous and frequent interdepartmental collaboration on children and youth policy development and program implementation supporting the provision of services for Maine families, children and youth that are planned, managed and

delivered in an integrated manner to support and enhance educational opportunities, self-sufficiency, safety, economic stability, health and well-being.”

Now, as we enter this new era of longevity, it’s time to be more intentional and thoughtful about promoting and supporting vigorous interdepartmental collaboration and coordination on aging and policy development and program implementation that supports the self-sufficiency, safety, opportunities, economic stability, and health of older Mainers.

LD 1733 proposes to do just that. It creates a Cabinet on Aging made up of leaders of the many state agencies who have a role to play in making sure our systems are up to supporting our new longevity. It provides a staff position to support this work, placed in the Maine Office of Policy Innovation and the Future. This is an appropriate place for this coordinating position as Maine will need to innovate to keep older workers in the workforce longer, address our severe direct care workforce shortage, use technology to deliver services in different ways, modernize our transportation systems, develop and build new models of housing, and create new systems of support that include all of our first responders.

The Cabinet is charged with developing interdepartmental goals and objectives for the coordinated use of existing and new resources, identifying needed research, identifying ways to support local healthy aging initiatives, and advising on the State Plan on Aging, created by the Department of Health & Human Services (the Department), and the State Plan for Alzheimer’s Disease and Related Dementias. These last two issues are critical. Every four years, the Department engages in a planning process that identifies the needs of older Mainers in advance of the creation of the State Plan on Aging. This legislation codifies a way for other state agencies to have input into the needs assessment, hear the findings from the assessment, participate in the planning process to create a more robust state plan, and report and measure progress toward implementation. Much of the language in the bill was borrowed from our neighbors in New Hampshire, who created a similar Commission on Aging last year. I’ve attached their enacting legislation to my testimony.

LD 1733 also enhances the obligations of the Department in relation to the State Plan on Aging. Historically, the State Plan on Aging, which is a requirement of the Older Americans Act, has been a roadmap for how the State of Maine will spend the federal Older Americans Act funding that comes to Maine. While it’s often a bit broader than funding allows, it does not typically create goals and objectives toward meeting non-federally funded needs. The new language calls upon other state agencies to have a role in developing and implementing parts of the State Plan on Aging. It also requires a broader look at the needs of older Mainers, including how workforce trends may impact delivery of services and where gaps in services exist.

Finally, LD 1733 proposes phasing out the terms “elderly” and “senior” from our laws and replacing these terms with “older individual.” Words matter and they contribute to a culture that can be supportive and inclusive or the opposite. We’re all aging from the time we’re born. Yet, at some point in our life, we distance ourselves from this idea and start thinking about older people as someone older than ourselves. The result is that the terms we use to describe older people – “elderly” and “senior” also start to mean someone other than us. Worse, these terms become associated with concepts of dependency and vulnerability even though the vast majority of older people are neither of those things.

This has been demonstrated by FrameWorks Institute, a national research organization, in their Reframing Aging empirical research. They conducted extensive national research on how people think about aging and older people. While I won't cover their fascinating findings and recommendations, I have included a chart from their research that inspired this portion of the bill. Ultimately, they found that the terms "elderly" and "seniors" are associated with the oldest and least competent among us.

We qualify for AARP membership when we're 50. 562,000 Mainers are over 50. We qualify for Older American Act services when we're 60. Nearly 350,000 Mainers are over 60. We qualify for Medicare when we're 65. 250,000 Mainers are over 65. Most every law we pass that relates to older Mainers is intended to assist people who are 60 and older. Most of these people don't see themselves as "elderly" or as "seniors." It's time our laws caught up to the reality that older people in Maine are not all vulnerable and in need of our protection. More importantly, our laws should include clear language that helps someone know that they are covered by the intent of the law. There is support for taking this action. In 2018, this body enacted LD 1871, which, among many other things, changed all reference to "substance abuse" to "substance use disorder".

Maine is the oldest state in the nation. As 50% of our adult population is over 50 years of age, Maine should be embracing our state motto to lead the nation in adapting systems to meet the changing needs of an aging population. The punchline is that, when we look through the lens of aging to address system changes, we create systems that work for everyone and create the kinds of communities that our younger generations are craving. Millennials in particular want to live in walkable communities with multi-generational housing and public transportation. They're the first generation to move to new cities and towns for quality of place over employment opportunities. Maine needs workers to maintain and grow our economy. Older Mainers need to be a part of our workforce solution, and building communities that work for older Mainers will also attract new workers to our state.

This complex system-change work should not be the responsibility of any one state agency. Instead, it should be a collaborative, interdepartmental process led by a person specifically charged with coordinating the process.

For all of these reasons, we urge you to support LD 1733. Thank you.