



**Testimony of Jess Maurer on Behalf of
The Maine Council on Aging
To Joint Standing Committee on
Health and Human Services**

Testimony in Support of LD 499

Delivered in Person on April 21, 2021

Greetings Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health & Human Services:

My name is Jess Maurer. I'm the Executive Director of the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of more than 100 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older Mainers working to make sure we can all live healthy, engaged, and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age in our homes and communities. I am testifying in favor of LD 499, An Act To Eliminate the Waiting Lists for Older and Disabled Residents Who Are Eligible To Receive Home-based Care.

We can all agree that if people are being harmed by collective forces outside of their individual control, we must act to address the harm. I am here today to ask you to right the harm being done to too many older and disabled Mainers who are not getting the care they are eligible to receive, putting their health, and the long term health of our economy at risk.

Home Based Care is a state funded program that provides home care services to medically eligible older and disabled people who lack sufficient personal and/or financial resources to pay for in-home services, and who do not qualify for other MaineCare services. Currently, there are more than 900 people who have been assessed eligible for this program, but who are waiting to receive the care they need because the current allocations for the program have been exhausted. Until there is additional funding, none of them will come off the waitlist. Some of these people have high needs where nursing homes are the only alternative if they cannot get home care.

The 2020 Long Term Supports and Services (LTSS) Scorecard, ranks Maine **50th in the nation for median annual home care private pay cost** as a percentage of median household income for ages 65+. This report tells us what we already knew, the cost of private pay home care in Maine exceeds the budgets of most Maine households. Our current situation isn't about people not working hard enough, or not saving enough money, or a family not stepping up to help – this is about Maine's workforce crisis that has driven the cost of home care beyond a price point that most older Mainers can afford.

The situation has grown so bad, that even people who can afford to pay out of pocket can sometimes not find care because of a lack of workers. At least people with resources have a place to turn – they can find someone they trust and pay them to do the work.

This is not an option available to lower income people. That is, unless they are receiving benefits under Section 63 or Chapter 11. People who receive this benefit are also able to self-direct, meaning they can hire someone they trust to do the work if they cannot find a home care worker through an agency. Thus, allocating additional general fund dollars to meet the waitlist not only allows medically eligible older Mainers to access home care through an agency, but also to pay a neighbor or friend to provide care if a worker is unavailable.

General fund allocations to Section 63 and Chapter 11 are investments in low-costs interventions that support healthy aging and pay big dividends. If people get the care they need under these sections, they will avoid unnecessary healthcare utilization and delay entry into facilities, the two most expensive types of care there are. Without home care, though, this is exactly what we see happening. People are being injured or getting sick and being hospitalized. They often cannot be discharged to home because of a lack of home care, and eventually find their way to nursing homes. Essentially, if we don't make a small investment in Section 63 now, we'll pay significantly more in other ways later.

We all need help throughout our lives in small and big ways. Needing help doesn't make us less productive or less valuable to our communities, families and state. Many people with disabilities old and young need assistance with activities of daily living to get going in the morning, to get going to jobs, caring for grandkids, or volunteering to help others. Making it impossible for them to overcome their need for help, means we're eliminating these people from our workforce and community, and we are diminishing the full benefit they can offer to society.

For these reasons, I urge you to vote in favor of LD 499.

Thank you.
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