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Maine Council on Aging Seeks Economic Justice for Older Diverse Mainers *Medicare Savings Program Offers Pathway to Economic Security for Tens of Thousands of Older Mainers*

[**Augusta, ME**] — Today, The Maine Council on Aging (MCOA) will provide testimony on [LD 1522, An Act to Provide Economic Justice to Historically Disadvantaged Older Citizens by Amending the Laws Governing the Medicare Savings Program](#), a bill it proposed after years of inquiry into the economic status of older women, older people with disabilities, and older diverse Mainers.

“We all believe in justice, yet sometimes we have blind spots that make it hard to see that some people who have experienced a lifetime of economic disparities and inequities have never had justice,” said Jess Maurer, Executive Director of the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). “LD 1522 is fueled by the belief that it’s never too late to secure justice for past harms and proposes a solution that will lift thousands of older Mainers out of poverty.”

LD 1522 grew out of the [report on the Economic Status of Older Women in Maine](#) and the MCOA’s work on [Equity and Healthy Aging](#). Here are just a few reasons we seek justice for older people:

- Maine women over 60 are nearly two times more likely than men to live at or below 150% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). 12% of women 80+ live in poverty as opposed to 6% of men.
- 2018 data shows Black or African American Mainers are more than 3 times as likely to experience poverty as white Mainers. Nationally, women of color over 80 years old live in poverty at a rate of 20%.
- Nationally, 17% of LGBTQ+ individuals have incomes below the Federal Poverty Level versus 12% in straight people.
- 52% of working-age Mainers with a disability live in or near poverty as opposed to 22% with no disability. In later life, women experience higher rates of disability than men.

One way to deliver economic justice to older people is to increase eligibility for the Medicare Savings Program (MSP), a program that offers older people with lower incomes help to pay for some or all of their Medicare premiums, deductibles, copayments, and coinsurance and saves them thousands of dollars annually. While states must implement the minimum eligibility for this program, they are free to set higher eligibility levels.

Through LD 1522, the MCOA proposes to use the National Elder Economic Security Standard Index as an indicator to help us understand the income people over 65 need in order to pay for their basic needs like food, healthcare, housing, transportation, and other essential needs. It proposes using the Elder Index to help establish the right MSP eligibility level, using the region of Maine, for a single person, in poor health who owns a home with a mortgage as the eligibility level for QI, and a single person in poor health who owns a home without a mortgage for QMB.

For context, Maine's current minimum wage is equal to \$28,704. All three current eligibility levels for MSP fall under the minimum wage. A livable wage in Maine is \$34,382. Using the Elder Index, an older person in poor health in Maine who owns their home with a mortgage needs \$36,444 *to meet their basic needs, not their long-term care needs*. LD 1522 directs the Department to establish eligibility for the MSP using this amount.

The bill also directs the Department to eliminate the asset test. Older women in Maine are more likely to need long term supports and less likely to be able to afford them. People who have done the right thing and saved for the eventuality that they will need to pay out of pocket for home care should not be forced to spend down these savings to qualify for help that is available to others with the same income.

Over the last 100 years, all racial groups have gained longevity in this country. For far too many who have been economically disadvantaged, this means having to live longer with fewer resources. Increasing eligibility for the MSP creates an opportunity for all older people to thrive and it will make our economy healthier. Passing this bill shows the state believes it is never too late for justice.

About Maine Council on Aging

The Maine Council on Aging is entering its second decade working to create a Maine where we can all live healthy, engaged and secure lives as we age in our homes and communities. We've woven together a broad, multi-disciplinary network of more than 130 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older people that defies typical social and political constructs and shares the common goal of building an age-positive culture in Maine. To learn more, visit www.maineCouncilonaging.org.