



**Testimony of Jena Jones on Behalf of
the Maine Council on Aging to the Joint Standing
Committee on Health and Human Services**

**In Favor of LD 824 – Resolve, Directing the
Department of Health and Human Services to Review
Reimbursement Rates for Nursing Facilities on
Islands**

Submitted on April 4, 2023

Greetings, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and the members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services.

My name is Jena Jones, and I am the Director of Policy and Advocacy at the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of over 135 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 favor of LD 824.

Maine is blessed with many vibrant communities, but few places across the state rival the cohesion and belonging attributed to our island and coastal communities. These are spaces rich in history and hospitality where neighbors help neighbors and multiple generations of community members have purpose and value. Life near the ocean seems to take a slower pace, happily off the beaten path.

When the Island Nursing Home in Deer Isle closed in 2021, 60 residents of the facility were displaced from their communities, cut off from vital, often lifelong connections. Nursing facility residents normally require high levels of care and support, meaning a family member safely assuming care of the individual is not likely. Worker shortages persist across Maine, and Island Nursing Home's staffing challenges were the same as any other facility needing workers but finding none.

However, worker shortages on islands bring different challenges than those on the mainland. First, there is a limited number of potential workers on any island, and it's very hard to hire from the island community alone. With increased housing prices everywhere, lower income workers tend to live inland, away from costly coastal communities. Thus, a worker who works in Portland may live in Durham or Windham, and already have a considerable commute to Portland.

Now consider that this same worker would have parking costs, ferry costs, and an extended commute to and from the island. To attract that same worker, the island facility will have to cover these costs and pay more to get that worker to decide to commute daily to the island – including in winter weather.

The resolution within LD 824 directs the Department to review reimbursement rates for nursing facilities on islands to ensure consistency in rates across facilities. Given the current state of Maine's significant workforce shortages, it is imperative that all aspects of correcting these challenges are explored. Though these communities are rich in Maine culture, they are also more keenly susceptible to the types of workforce challenges we're experiencing, and the consequences attached to them.

The MCOA supports the efforts within LD 824 to review reimbursement rates for these facilities as it provides an additional measure toward our understanding of the current state of our care infrastructure and may provide potential solutions toward ensuring every Mainer that needs care receives it. With that said, Maine is home to other remote/rural communities that experience many similar challenges to island communities. The work done under this bill should explore further whether reimbursement rates should take these challenges into account. For these reasons we urge you to support LD 824.

Thank you.

Jena Jones