



News Release

For Immediate Release

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Maine Council on Aging Recognizes Inspired Leaders *2025 award recipients to be honored at Change AGEnt Summit*

Brunswick, Maine – September 9, 2025 - Today, the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA) announced the 2025 award recipients who will be honored for their inspired and sustained leadership at the [Change AGEnt Summit](#), on September 19, 2025.

“Our annual awards shine a spotlight on Maine leaders who are quietly dedicating part or all of their careers to making Maine a healthier, safer, more inclusive place to live and work for older Mainers,” said Jess Maurer, Executive Director of the Maine Council on Aging. “These honorees have had an impressive impact on the lives of older Mainers, and we honor them to ensure Maine people know about their important work and leadership.”

Please join us in celebrating this year’s honorees:

Brenda Gallant, Executive Director of Maine’s Long Term Care Ombudsman Program, is being recognized with the **2025 Lasting Legacy Award** for her unyielding advocacy to ensure older Mainers receive quality care in the settings of their choice, tireless efforts to grow, support, and celebrate Maine’s care workforce, and innovative and pioneering leadership on so many issues – from bereavement to equity to elder abuse prevention. Brenda’s passion for her work shines through in everything she does, from championing public policy at the legislature to finding creative solutions for individual clients. Her advocacy, compassion, and leadership make her a trusted voice in Maine’s advocacy community, where she’s known for her ability to navigate complex issues and advocate for those who sometimes cannot speak for themselves. Brenda has made Maine a better place for both people who need care and those who provide it.

Representative Kristen Cloutier of Lewiston, District 94, is being honored with the **2025 Legislator of the Year Award** for her steadfast dedication to the well-being of older people in Maine, family care partners, and Maine’s care workforce. A strategic thinker and a powerful advocate, Rep. Cloutier has proven time and again that she knows how to get things done, and she follows through on her commitments. Rep. Cloutier led efforts to pilot, and this year to formally establish, the [incredibly effective and successful Respite for ME Program](#), a program that creates flexible benefits for informal family care partners. This session, she also defended against cuts to funding for care workers, helped establish a law to create a care gap report, and championed the Older Mainer’s Act, ensuring that some level of flexible funding be awarded to address a critical shortage in services for older Mainers. Older Mainers are lucky to have Rep. Cloutier fighting for us!

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This year, the **2025 Trailblazing Advocate Award** honors two incredible Maine leaders Claudette Ndayininahaze and Dr. Rebecca Spear.

Claudette Ndayininahaze, Executive Director of In Her Presence, is being honored as a **2025 Trailblazing Advocate** for her sustained efforts to intentionally create on-going opportunities for older immigrant women to learn together, connect with each other, and contribute to their community, working with them to co-create a nurturing, respectful, and healthy multi-generational community of immigrant women who are contributing to Maine in so many ways. Claudette is a leader who never rests, keeping focused on the broader community she is building and also the individual needs of each member of that community – the babies, the young mothers, the workers, older men who do not know how to cook, and older women who have so many skills to share. Every day through courageous conversations, creative programs, and an amazing depth of compassion, she is strengthening connections across generations and between cultures.

Dr. Rebecca Spear, Program Director, Geriatric Medicine Fellowship, Maine-Dartmouth Family Medicine Practice, is being recognized as a **2025 Trailblazing Advocate** for her sustained leadership in advocating for better access and better care for older Mainers. Dr. Spear is committed to sharing her expertise to inspire clinicians to provide the best possible care. Her approach is rooted in empathy and mindfulness, ensuring that the experiences and care goals of older people are respected throughout their interactions with the healthcare system. But she doesn't stop there. When she sees barriers to quality care for older people, she takes the next step to act to reduce these barriers. Whether showing up to testify on critical bills that address Maine's critical care workforce shortage, lending her expertise to shape policy, or leading efforts to reduce ageism in healthcare, she is not only making a difference, but is inspiring other healthcare professionals to follow the trail she's blazing. We celebrate her efforts to transform care in Maine.

Leslie Hill, Professor Emeritus of Politics, Bates College, is being honored with the **2025 Douglas O. Wilson Rising Tide Leadership Award** for her efforts to build community with and for Black Elders in Maine, disrupt ageism within her spheres of influence, especially in grantmaking, and help us all learn how ageism intersects with racism, sexism, and other forms of bias. Leslie leads with curiosity, learns in conversation, and inspires action. This is how she created the BIPoC Elders group that has been building a community for and lifting up the experiences of BIPoC Elders in Maine since 2022. Leslie brings joy and laughter to meetings and events, drawing quiet voices in and making space for all. Leslie is honored for her vision and unyielding efforts to design, fund, and lead the Black Elders Photovoice Project, a project that not only lifts up the visibility of Black Elders and builds stronger community, but acts as a powerful tool that other groups of elders can use to explore and share their experiences of aging.

Motivational Services, Inc. (MOCO) in Augusta is being honored with the **2025 Business Excellence Award** for their intentional, strategic, and sustained efforts to create a workplace that embraces the power of older workers, promotes age-inclusivity, and serves as a model of business excellence. Under the visionary leadership of John Zarrilli, and with support of his dedicated team, MOCO proactively partnered with the MCOA to provide training to leaders across all job categories, engaged in action planning, and then created the Change AGency Workforce Team, which is taking bold action to reshape the organization's culture and infrastructure, including adapting physical spaces for accessibility and embedding age-positive values in staff training and daily operations. They took the next step and became a [Certified Age Friendly Employer](#). MOCO has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to innovation and inclusion and is fostering a thriving multigenerational workforce and responsive community for residents.

These inspiring leaders and business will be honored at the MCOA's annual [Change AGent Summit](#) on September 19th at the Cross Insurance Center in Bangor. Press credentials offered to any reporter wishing to cover these events.

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About Maine Council on Aging:

The Maine Council on Aging is a broad, multi-disciplinary network of more than 140 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older Mainers working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged, and secure lives in our homes and community settings. For more information: www.mainecouncilonaging.org

About the Awards:

The **Lasting Legacy Award** recognizes and celebrates the sustained leadership of people whose commitment, ideals, and actions throughout their careers have brought about lasting and positive change to the lives of older Mainers.

The **Legislator of the Year Award** recognizes and celebrates the sustained efforts of legislative leaders who actively champion legislative initiatives that improve the health, safety, and economic security of older Mainers and/or increase and improve access to quality aging services.

The **Trailblazing Advocate Award** recognizes and celebrates the sustained contributions of community members and leaders whose passion, actions, and advocacy have made Maine a better place for us all to age with dignity, health, purpose and security.

The **Douglas O. Wilson Rising Tide Leadership Award**, awarded in partnership with Southern Maine Agency on Aging and Community Health Options, recognizes and celebrates the sustained efforts of people who lift and inspire others to implement innovative solutions to challenges faced by older Mainers through collaborative partnerships, shared leadership and/or community building initiatives.

The **Business Excellence Award** recognizes and celebrates the sustained efforts of Maine employers to implement strategic practices and policies that value and sustain the contributions of older workers and support family caregivers.