



Maine Association of
Area Agencies on Aging

P.O. Box 5415
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TESTIMONY OF SUSAN GARASCIA, RN, ON BEHALF OF THE
MAINE ASSOCIATION OF AREA AGENCIES ON AGING

Submitted February 13, 2013

Senator Craven, Representative Farnsworth and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Susan Garascia. I am a registered nurse and am the Community Services Administrator for Spectrum Generations, one of Maine's five Area Agencies on Aging. I am testifying today on behalf of all of Maine's Area Agencies on Aging who are strongly in support of LD 62.

There are an estimated 230,000 informal family caregivers in Maine. These are spouses, children, grandchildren and other relatives caring for aging and disabled adults who can no longer live independently. Many of these caregivers are caring for the more than 37,000 people in Maine who are living with some form of dementia. While many people with dementia can live independently for a long time, as the disease progresses, these folks often need 24/7 monitoring to remain safely living at home.

Many of Maine's caregivers are also productive workers in our shirking workforce. Unfortunately, as caregiving demands increase, if these caregivers cannot access and afford supports and services, their employment status is challenged. Indeed, far too often, these caregivers must take a leave of absence or go part time to care for their loved ones. Consider that an online survey of Maine's informal caregivers found that a full 50% of employed caregivers had changed from full to part-time status due to their caregiving. For those who can access it, adult day services allows employed caregivers to remain in the workforce.

Spectrum Generations is a private, non-profit organization that primarily serves the people of central Maine as their Area Agency on Aging. Spectrum Generations runs an adult day service in four of its seven community centers, serving 72 consumers. These programs are located in the towns of Waterville, Hallowell, Belfast, and Skowhegan. Southern Maine Agency on Aging, a non-profit organization serving York and Cumberland Counties, also operates an adult day service program, serving 41 consumers.

Adult day services are a critical part of the long-term care continuum – these are community based services that enable older and disabled adults to successfully live at home. These services provide caregivers the much needed support they need so they can continue to

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contribute to Maine's economy. For caregivers providing 24/7 care, adult day services allows these caregivers time to do necessary chores, like grocery shopping, cleaning, and car repair, to get to doctor's appointments or even time to get some sleep.

Each year, Maine's Agencies on Aging field tens of hundreds of inquiries from caregivers inquiring about available supports and services that will allow them to continue to work and support their family. In searching for care, they want to know that their loved one is being well taken care of by a competent and caring provider. Many of these caregivers are low income and are just getting by economically. They are at the proverbial fork in the road with three painful choices: 1) let their loved one stay at home, unsupervised, without socialization, while they are at work; running the risk of them falling or getting hurt, wandering off, or not eating; 2) quit their job to stay home and care for their loved one and see if they can qualify for government assistance to make ends meet; or 3) if their loved one qualifies, look into assisted living facility placement which is more costly and can be a heart rendering decision for everyone involved.

Caregivers call Spectrum Generations because they are at wits end. They are referred to available community resources including adult day service programs in their area. If they do not qualify for adult day services through MaineCare or any other funding source, they may potentially qualify under Office of Aging and Disabilities (OADS) Section 61 adult day respite services. Sadly, because of increased demand for these services and the current limited funding of such programs, these critical supports and services are not available to many who desperately need and financially qualify for them. As of late last year, only 43 participants were being served statewide under section 61 and 13 were on the wait list. Caregivers try to piece it together while languishing on the wait list, hoping that an opening occurs before it is too late.

Sadly, the economics of running adult day services doesn't work. My own program at Spectrum Generations has operated in a deficit the last three years. Adult day service programs are closing. Aroostook Area Agency on Aging recently closed both of their critically needed programs. They could not make their program work economically with eligible consumers on waiting lists and with a reimbursement rate that has not increased since 1997. Unfortunately, the economics of rural Maine do not allow for private pay to make up difference. This is a real tragedy because there is such a huge and growing need.

There are two critical public policy reasons for supporting LD 62 and increased funding for adult day services generally. With an increasingly aging population, Maine needs to rely on

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informal caregivers to provide care for their aging relatives. With a faltering economy and shrinking workforce, Maine needs all of our productive workers to remain in the workforce.

If caregivers aren't providing in-home care, we don't have sufficient beds in nursing facilities to care for the people needing care, nor sufficient funds in the budget to provide for this care. In order for caregivers to provide in-home care and remain in the workforce, they have to be able to access and afford the kinds of supports and services that allow them to stay at work. If providers cannot afford to run these programs, there will be no programs, and thus, the first part of the formula, access, fails. If the programs exist and are all private pay, low income caregivers cannot afford the services, so the second part of the formula fails. We need to provide both incentives to providers to run quality adult day services and ensure that low income caregivers can gain meaningful access to these programs. LD 62 is a step in the right direction on both counts and furthers these two critical public policy goals.

It is well documented that home based supports and services such as adult day services are far less expensive than assisted living and nursing home care. Instead of reducing state funding for these programs, the state needs to be investing in these programs as a means of helping elders successfully age at home in their community and achieving much-needed cost savings.

I urge you to vote to approve LD 62 in order to help to keep people aging in place and out of costly institutional care. Without its passage, I fear more and more programs will shut their doors.

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