



Maine Association of
Area Agencies on Aging

P.O. Box 5415
Augusta, ME 04332

TESTIMONY OF NANCY KELLEHER, BOARD MEMBER OF THE
MAINE ASSOCIATION OF AREA AGENCIES ON AGING

Submitted February 7, 2013

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

My name is Nancy Kelleher. I am a board member of the Maine Association of Area Agencies on Aging (M4A). M4A is a private, non-profit organization that is the advocacy voice for Maine's five Area Agencies on Aging on issues that promote independence, dignity and economic self-reliance for Maine's seniors.

M4A supports efforts to fully fund the Homemaker Services Program as well as other state-funded programs that help our elders successfully age at home. As Maine is the oldest and most rural state in the country, there has never been a more important time to focus on the supports and services Mainers need to successfully age in place in their homes and communities.

Each year, Maine's Agencies on Aging field tens of thousands of inquiries from Maine seniors about available supports and services. Many of these folks are very low income and only need help with some basic activities of daily living to remain living well in their homes. We frequently refer seniors who may qualify to the Homemaker Services Program and the state-funded In Home and Community Home Based Care. For low-income seniors who qualify for these programs and who are lucky enough to get services, these programs are quite literally a life-saver.

Sadly because of increased demand for these services and inadequate funding, these critical supports and services are not currently available to many who desperately need them. Both the Homemaker Services Program and the Home and Community Based Care Program have long waiting lists for their services. What's worse is that attrition is not keeping up with the costs of running the programs and existing consumers in the programs are now experiencing a loss of services due to budget constraints and budget cuts.

Maine seniors are fiercely independent and proud. They will do for themselves as long as they are able and they do not like to ask for help. Because of this, far too many seniors wait until they are in crisis before they seek assistance. Once they finally make the call for help, they're now finding they cannot access the services they need, even though they qualify to receive them.

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As stated on the DHHS website, these programs “provide supportive services to elderly and disabled adults in order *to avoid or delay nursing home placement.*” It is well documented that home based supports and services are far less expensive than 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 in place and achieving much-needed cost savings.

We urge you to fully fund the Homemaker Services Program and other state-funded programs that help to keep people aging in place and out of costly institutional care.

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