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Testimony in support of

LD 949 – An Act To Enact the Recommendations of the Commission on Independent Living and Disability

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Representative Gattine and distinguished members of the DHHS Committee, I am Rep. Mike McClellan and I serve Maine House District 66 which includes parts of Raymond, Casco and Poland. I am here to discuss my sponsorship of LD 949 – “An Act To Enact the Recommendations of the Commission on Independent Living and Disability”.

This bill seeks to pass the enactment of the 8 recommendations of the 2014 Blue Ribbon Committee that looked at Independent Living and Disability. As you know, this commission spent 5 meetings looking at the state of independent living in Maine for people with disabilities and sought to both examine our current status and empower people through supporting movement and improvements.

The Blue Ribbon Commission was the brainstorm of your own Rep. Peterson. He co-chaired the commission and held the group to a high standard of real discussion. I believe this was my 4th commission and I still am impressed by this group's willingness to push and look at uncomfortable realities. This session, you have already heard the report back from this commission. I appreciated that process as well as the fact that you gave us plenty of time to present our findings and you asked great questions. I also thank you for your continued interest as I know there has been a lot of discussion since the report back.

I also am the Executive Director of the Maine Statewide Independent Living Council (Maine SILC) and served on the commission in that role. Even as a 5 year member of the Legislature, I did not know how or when you might choose to process the commission report. I posted LD 949 after a discussion with Mel Clarrage, Maine SILC Chair. We decided to create LD 949 as a way to move forward if your committee did not get to the commission information early enough in this session or if you did, as a fall back if there was disagreement or even a tool for your committee to use. As we stand here this afternoon, it is clear LD 949 is now available as a tool for us all to use to make changes that empower Maine people with disabilities. The eight recommendations cover a variety of areas regarding independent living.

There is a lot here to consider. Some straight forward items like asking for regular yearly reports and affirming responsibility for building codes that support independent living. We also present ideas that are paradigm shifts like creating a voucher transportation system that we believe will

work better, save money and offer freedom to so many who cannot access transportation when needed.

There is a lot here...however, this report offers us the opportunity to enact change that will empower so many people with disabilities who want to work, want to pay taxes (yes, want to pay taxes) and currently do not have the necessary support. We know of many people who wish to be here but cannot due to the issues we are discussing today. This report offers us the ability to break down even some of the silos we all recognize as barriers to success. And finally, this report offers us ways to look at our current system and begin to make funding changes that will more effectively spend the monies that are currently meant to support Maine people with disabilities. It will be interesting to see who comes behind me to say this work cannot be done.

I am excited for this discussion, for your willingness to have it and how this work will empower people. The last Blue Ribbon Commission on Independent Living was in 1985, 30 years ago. Have we all been placed here to do this work? Are we willing to work to truly empower people- an opportunity that is rare? Thank you for your attention and support of LD 949.