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November 13, 2017

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Aging Gracefully: The Importance of Home Care and Hospice

It's no secret that Maine is one of the oldest states in the nation. Obviously this age has many benefits – say, wisdom – but it's also true that an aging population brings medical and logistical challenges. Fortunately, Maine is home to an incredible community of home care providers who help patients recover, and hospice workers who provide comfort at the end of life's journey. This November marks National Home Care and Hospice Month and gives our state the opportunity to recognize the incredible contributions of those who work in these fields.

Home care is exactly what it sounds like – providing medical care to patients in their homes – and yet it's so much more! The opportunity to recover at home, whether it be in the heart of a city or the end of a country road, allows individuals to heal in the place most familiar and comfortable to them. By making sure patients can get the care they need while remaining in their home, home care workers enable seniors to live longer, happier lives surrounded by family, friends and neighbors. That is an incredible service, one that brings immense joy and vitality to our communities.

To expand the reach of home care, it's vital that we pursue opportunities to increase the prevalence of home care across our state, and support policies that increase its accessibility. One such opportunity is the rise of telehealth, which allows medical practitioners to advise patients over video chat. This prevents a patient from needing to travel to medical appointments, and allows the doctor to efficiently deliver in-home care to folks who may live far away from the medical provider – a true win-win.

However, this program's unique ability to help those who live in our state's rural areas is hindered by the insufficient broadband access available in those same communities. That's why I'm a cofounder of the Senate Broadband Caucus, working with my colleagues to find legislative solutions to bridge this digital divide. By increasing connectivity across our state, we'll be able to ensure our rural regions have the ability to fully take advantage of the options provided by 21st century healthcare.

In order to truly maximize the long-term effectiveness of home care, we also have to ensure that those who grow older in their own homes will be able to safely navigate their home when providers are not present. That is why, along with Senator Susan Collins, I have introduced the "Senior Home Modification Assistance Initiative Act." This bill would simplify the process to secure federal funding for important home modifications, like grab bars in showers or wheelchair accessible doors. By making this process easier to navigate, more seniors will be able to utilize the program and install features allowing them to live longer, healthier lives in their homes.

But as we all know, there's no amount of medicine or legislation that can prevent the inevitable. In a patient's final moments, the work of hospice workers provides an immense service. The job that these men and women take on is simply incredible. During moments of grief, they provide comfort. During moments of fear, they provide support. During moments of acute stress and turmoil, they balance the wishes and opinions of the patient, family, friends and other medical professionals, each of whom has his or her own thoughts on how best to handle an incredibly challenging situation. The task is all-encompassing, and requires a special strength – one that has been present in every hospice caregiver I've ever met. In fact, these men and women often tell me how fulfilling the job is, and how they feel they get as much as they give. These are truly special people who make immense contributions to our state, and it's crucial that they be recognized and supported.

Maine's elderly populations aren't just abundant – they are vital to our state, and have built the communities that make Maine so special today. They deserve to age gracefully and, when the time comes, die peacefully. That is exactly what is provided by home care and hospice professionals. Their extraordinary care provides a gift to our seniors and to our state that must be celebrated. To all those who dedicate their time and efforts to providing this care, I say: Thank you.