



MAINE  
ADULT GUARDIANSHIP  
SERVICES

Vanessa P. Bell, MPPM  
Founder and Manager  
135 Maine St, STE A-105.  
Brunswick, ME 04011  
Phone: 207.712.0477

Vanessa@maineadultguardianship.com  
www.maineadultguardianship.com

The Honorable Justin Alford  
143 Vaughan Street  
Portland, ME 04102

October 23, 2014  
Re: Concerns about MaineCare annual reviews

Dear Senator,

I am an advocate for adults 18 years or older who have developmental disabilities, mental illness, or aging issues. Although what I'm about to discuss has been an ongoing issue for years, during the last 4 months in particular I have had nearly 8 clients **lose or almost lose their MaineCare due to an annual letter that was not completed.** This letter, known as a review, is long in length, and sent only to the client—not to family members or case workers, even if they request it each year—who only has **one week to complete** it by the time it hits their mailboxes. The timeframe is even shorter since it has to arrive and be reviewed by the 7<sup>th</sup> day.

This letter/review is **incomprehensible** to most of my clients. It is not in plain language and contains far too much information, which is often overwhelming to the recipient. **The purpose of this letter is to “review” the person’s case to essentially ensure that they are still disabled** and not earning any more money. The reviewer wants to know if the recipient’s income or medical needs have changed at all. At first glance, this appears to be perfectly reasonable. However it is far less reasonable once one considers the fact that **many of the recipients are completely disabled** and have been for YEARS, if not their entire lives. Many recipients live in MaineCare waiver homes, go in and out of institutions, live in nursing facilities, are homeless, or are barely living independently and only get help with mail once a month. In other words, many recipients never even know this letter exists, which is why many cannot complete it at all, let alone get it to someone to review, complete, and return within 7 days. **What’s more, the letter is only sent once. There is no additional notice or follow up.** No one is ever notified that her review was not completed. The next piece of mail is usually “*your MaineCare services have been terminated as of...*” I kid you not.

Now, I'm sure someone will tell you, “*Oh, but they can call or complete this online through MyMaineConnection*”. **Senator, please try calling MaineCare sometime, I beg you.** The number is 800-432-7802. Most of my attempts have consisted of up to 90 minute wait times before...wait for it...the call transfers incorrectly and hangs up. So I have to once again call and wait another 90 minutes to get through, if I do at all. And **MyMaineConnection is great, when it’s actually working.** Documents get lost “in the queue,” I’ve been told. My favorite experience was when a MaineCare worker yelled at me for giving her feedback. I explained that most of my clients do not have email and they therefore ask me to use my email to receive notifications. My two emails are

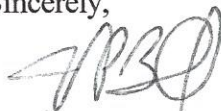
attached to many recipients. I get notifications...with no hint of identifying information! It says something like “*you have a new notification. Please respond within 10 days*”. That’s it. So then I have to log in to all of my accounts to see who actually has a notification! I explained this to the worker who yelled at me, “*You can’t have your email attached to more than one client*”. When I tried to inform her that many case workers fill out these forms, she again yelled at me and then HUNG UP! I called back. I was furious. I wanted to speak to her supervisor. But I got stuck in the queue. Since I had waited over thirty minutes for that call, I threw my hands in the air and gave up. Nevertheless, I do usually get very pleasant workers and have expressed this concern many times over. However, I have seen no changes as of yet.

As an advocate and Maine citizen, **I am sick and tired of** people who need services having what can only be described as **intentional barriers to service**. Why should anyone who has been receiving services FOR YEARS lose MaineCare because a letter was never returned? Why do they receive it annually at all if the review never changes for them? If information IS needed, it would take a MaineCare worker a very short time to view the claims or files and find the majority of the information. The least they could do is find someone to complete the review before terminating their service! **Please address this issue**. I have a client who has lost MaineCare due to this issue, and lives in a 24/7 home and has for the past 30 years. I only found out two months AFTER MaineCare terminated services, when the provider finally realized they were not getting paid. **NO ONE had any idea for months**. No one received a letter. I tried to call MaineCare, but they wouldn’t talk to me. I asked the guardian to call MaineCare, and they wouldn’t even talk to her! They wanted a release and PROOF she was guardian. Anyone can find out if someone has a guardian by looking at MaineProbate.net. It is very simple to do, but beyond that, the guardian’s information is already in Mainecare’s file. And so, this is how you have a **30 year MaineCare recipient lose her MaineCare over a letter, which she has otherwise completed every year for the last 30 years**. Now, we have to completely re-apply for benefits. I wish I were joking, but I’m not.

Also, another pet peeve of mine, which I feel is another “**intentional barrier**” is **access to TANF benefits (food stamps) information**. When a client wants to know the balance on their card, we call the number. Then? **We have to enter a 19 digit number**. Think about the clients I just described above. Can you imagine them trying to punch in 19 digits? It makes me cringe every time. I feel like the question screams, “You gotta work for those food stamps!” or “can’t enter it? Then you don’t deserve them!”

**Please, Senator, let’s stop humiliating people in need**. The majority of Mainers in need of these services are already down for the count. We don’t need to keep kicking them while they are down.

Sincerely,



VANESSA P. BELL

Guardian, case worker and advocate from Topsham