



**Commission to Study Long-term Care
Workforce Issues**

December 17, 2019

Commissioner Jeanne M. Lambrew
Department of Health and Human Services
11 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0011

Dear Commissioner Lambrew,

We are writing to relay the concern of the Commission to Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues regarding the urgent need for the Department of Health and Human Services to increase reimbursement rates for state and MaineCare funded services for long-term service and supports including home and community-based services, PNMI and nursing facilities, and consumer-directed services for older adults and individuals with physical and developmental disabilities as soon as possible.

As you know, because you are a member, the Commission was established pursuant to Public Law 2019, chapter 343 (the biennial budget), Part BBBBBB in response to the workforce shortages experienced across the spectrum of long-term service and supports, from the Homemaker program to nursing facilities. Maine is currently the oldest state in the nation with a long-term service and supports system that is in crisis. Direct care workers, including those who are committed and would prefer to remain in their caregiving professions, are unable to make a living and are leaving the field for better paying jobs. Direct care workers do hard physical work that is also emotionally taxing and they deserve to be paid more than they are currently paid. Many are working long hours at multiple jobs, often without benefits, in an attempt to make ends meet. On the other side of the equation, consumers of these services are going without care that they need, and have been approved for, due to a severe workforce shortage. Older adults and individuals with disabilities who try to take care of themselves when someone else should be there poses a serious safety risk. As a result, these individuals are likely to end up in the hospital or in a nursing home with a higher level of care that is more expensive. Older adults and individuals with disabilities in this state deserve consistent and quality care from caregivers that they trust and can build relationships with.

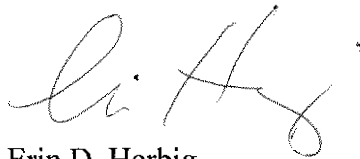
From the provider perspective, the current reimbursement rates are both inadequate and unsustainable. Providers are committed to providing services to people who live in this state who both need and are entitled to these services. However, from a business perspective, the system is in crisis. Several nursing facilities have recently closed and providers across the long-term supports and services spectrum are often operating at a loss. Providers also have many unfilled positions because they are unable to attract direct care workers. Reimbursement levels do not cover existing costs and future anticipated structural additions to costs will make the

situation worse. Providers will have to comply with state and federal laws and regulations including the upcoming increase in the minimum wage, the requirement to provide paid time off, insurance mandates, electronic visit verification requirements and background checks (including the possibility of finger printing) but there is insufficient funding to do that.

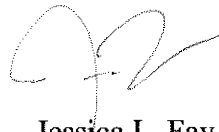
The Commission understands that the Department of Health and Human Services will be reporting to the Health and Human Services Committee regarding its efforts to establish a rational and regularly reviewed rate scheme. Providers need immediate relief in the form of a rate increase as well as ongoing predictability in rate review. Accordingly, we urge you to take all necessary steps to increase reimbursement rates as soon as possible, including any requests for appropriations, in order to prevent providers from going out of business, more committed direct care workers from leaving their chosen profession, and our older adults and individuals with disabilities from finding themselves in untenable and unsafe positions that lead to a higher, more expensive level of care.

We thank you for your attention to this very important matter.

Sincerely,



Erin D. Herbig
Senate Chair



Jessica L. Fay
House Chair

cc: Michelle Probert, Director of the Office of MaineCare Services
Molly Bogart, Director of Government Relations