

Testimony on LD 258, “An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025.”

February 22, 2023

Arthur Phillips, Economic Policy Analyst, Maine Center for Economic Policy

Good afternoon, Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs; Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Arthur Phillips, and I am an analyst at the Maine Center for Economic Policy.

I am here to voice support for the Governor’s budget proposal regarding services for older Maine residents, and to urge you to make far deeper investments to ensure people across our state have the resources they need to live healthy, dignified lives.

The Governor’s proposal includes wise investments in Meals on Wheels and Area Agencies on Aging, rate increases for adult day programs, funds to implement parts of the Elder Justice Roadmap, and increased funding to ensure nursing home workers are getting paid at least 125% of the minimum wage. These are a few examples of how this budget recognizes the need to invest in supports for older Mainers.

However, we must highlight how much more work there is to do. As we all know, there is a chronic under-supply of direct care workers to provide supports and services to older Mainers and people with disabilities. While the causes are myriad, low pay and reimbursement rates for direct care are the fundamental sources.

The impact of undervaluing care work is, of course, felt most directly by care workers themselves and the clients they serve. Workers struggle to piece together manageable schedules and sufficient income, while clients struggle to access quality care and maintain it in the face of high turnover rates. But these dynamics reverberate throughout our entire economy, as the impossible task of juggling work and care responsibilities pulls people away from work they would otherwise choose to continue pursuing. The employment impacts harm families, employers, the broader health care sector, the State’s revenue base, and our overall economic prosperity. Next month, the Maine Center for Economic Policy

Board of Directors

Barbara Burt, Chair
Lucy Van Hook, Vice-Chair
Pamela Cox, Treasurer
Ben Chin, Secretary

Sandra Butler
Maulian Dana
Marcus Hutchins
Jessica Maurer

Stacy Mitchell
Matt Schlobohm
Lee Webb

will release a report that will illustrate the enormous costs of undervaluing our direct care workers, which we would be glad to share with you.

We hope legislators this session will build on the Governor's proposals by pursuing initiatives to enhance the value we place on direct care work, and to provide older residents with the resources they need to live with dignity. Doing so will have critical, far-reaching impacts not only on those workers and their clients, but on families, other workers, employers, and our state's long-term economic vitality.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I am happy to answer any questions.