



**Direct Care and
Support Professional**
ADVISORY COUNCIL

TESTIMONY

In Support of

**LD 1718; An Act to Encourage Participation in Maine's Essential Support Workforce Through Access to
Higher Education**

Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business

May 2nd, 2023

Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

Good afternoon, Senator Curry, Representative Roberts and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business.

I am Nicole Marchesi. I am the Project Manager for the Direct Care and Support Professional Advisory Council. I am pleased to submit testimony in support of this legislation on behalf of Council members.

The Council was established in 2022, by the Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program to bring essential workers together from across the state to establish a strong collective voice that offers expertise and guidance to policymakers and legislators on key workforce issues and initiatives. Council members are employed across the continuum of long-term services and support settings. I am providing a link to the Direct Care and Support Advisory Council report along with this testimony for your review.

<https://www.maineombudsman.org/pdf/focus-group-report.pdf>

The essential workforce shortage has had a significant impact on access to care in all long-term services and supports settings. The Ombudsman Program has received an increasing number of referrals for older and disabled adults who need assistance in accessing home care as well as with admission to

nursing homes and residential care. Many long-term care facilities have limited admissions due to staffing vacancies. The staffing shortage has also impacted nursing home closures having a significant impact on residents who must be moved to another facility. While Maine has made real progress in addressing the essential work force shortage, more must be done to recruit and retain essential workers.

The Essential Support Worker Tuition Grant Program and Fund is one way to expand support to recruit and retain essential support workers. The Grant allows the opportunity for an eligible essential support worker to expand their education or provide the opportunity for a worker's spouse, domestic partner, worker's biological child, adopted child or a grandchild to support their goal of a higher education. Given the Essential Support Workers' current wage scales this is an opportunity that may not be obtainable otherwise. This Grant provides an opportunity to lessen the financial burden of higher education.

Direct Care and Support Advisory Council members express a deep commitment to their work in providing care to Maine's older and disabled adults. Low wages and the high cost of living are barriers to essential workers who would like to pursue higher education. The Essential Support Worker Grant Program and Fund offers hope and opportunity to workers. It is likely to have the additional benefit of attracting more workers to this important work.

Thank you for your consideration.