

Testimony in Opposition to
LD 1639, An Act to Address Unsafe Staffing of Nurses and Improve
Patient Care

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Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Laurie Belden, a resident of Durham and the Executive Director of the Home Care & Hospice Alliance of Maine (Alliance). The Alliance is a network of home health care, hospice, home care and personal care providers across our State delivering in-home care to older adults and disabled individuals of all ages, allowing them to stay in their home and community.

I'm here today to testify in opposition to **LD 1639, An Act to Address Unsafe Staffing of Nurses and Improve Patient Care.**

Hospitals, nursing homes, and home-based care are like a 3-legged stool in the state's healthcare landscape. Caring for Mainers in the home is essential to relieving the stress on facilities by keeping patients out of acute and long-term care settings.

The bill before you would require hospitals to comply with mandatory staffing requirements for nurses. While we believe the intent of this bill is honorable, the ripple effect would devastate the home care industry, which is already struggling to recruit and retain nurses.

The workforce shortage in nursing is chronic across the entire healthcare continuum; however, the primary reason that home care providers are unable to hire and retain enough nurses is not due to a lack of applicants – it is directly due to the low reimbursement rate from MaineCare. Hospitals, nursing homes, etc. already offer higher rates of pay and incentive bonuses for several reasons including receiving higher State reimbursement, more private pay patients, other streams of profitable services, etc. The average hospital RN rate of pay in Maine is approximately \$36/hour. Up until the recent COLA adjustment, the MaineCare reimbursement rate for RN labor for home care services was \$29/hour. Seven dollars an hour is a stark difference, one that means home care providers are unable to compete for talent. And while the recent COLA adjustment was desperately needed and greatly appreciated, it is not enough to make up this structural gap between outdated State reimbursement and market rates.

If this legislation passes, hospitals will have no choice but to increase their recruitment efforts by offering even higher wages, bonuses, and benefits – compensation packages that home care providers won't be able to match. The home care nursing shortage will become even more severe, and patients who need care in the home won't be able to access it.

Without adequate nurses in home care, children and adults with complex medical needs must be taken care of by family members or friends (who would perhaps be forced to leave their jobs to be a full-time caretakers). If no one is able to step in and care for the patient, they must be transferred to facility care (including hospitals). Therefore, the cycle of stress on our hospital system continues.

Instead of implementing staffing mandates for hospital nurses, let's even the playing field to help keep patients out of hospitals and in their homes and communities. Support expediting RN and LPN rate increases in home care instead of pulling the lifeline for the many older Mainers and people of all ages with disabilities who choose to receive their care in the safety of their home and community.

The loss of any nurses to other healthcare sectors will cause more home care agencies to scale back or cease the provision of nursing services, and patients in need of care in their homes will suffer.

Please vote "ought not to pass" to ensure that home care remains a viable care option for Mainers.

Laurie Belden, Executive Director

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