



Testimony of Brenda Peluso on Behalf of Maine's Essential Care & Support Workforce Partnership

Submitted on March 12, 2025

Testimony in Support of LD 327: An Act to Provide Additional Funding to Support In-home Personal Support Services for Qualified Senior Citizens

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Brenda Peluso, and I am the coordinator for Maine's Essential Care & Support Workforce Partnership, a broad coalition of employers, workers, and concerned individuals working to increase access to quality direct care and support in Maine by changing the way we value workers and the work they do.

We believe LD 327 will produce a good return on investment. The Personal Support Services funded in this bill, allow older Mainers and people with disabilities to stay in their homes as long as possible - where they prefer to be - where they do best - and where their care costs the least. Additionally, they allow loved ones, their family caregivers, to remain in the workforce.

The following is an excerpt from the 2023 report¹, commissioned by the Essential Care & Support Workforce and published by the Maine Center on Economic Policy:

- Our collective failure to adequately support direct care workers is keeping more than 8,000 people out of Maine's labor force.
- Maine is missing out on over \$1 billion per year in additional economic activity as a result of people dropping out of the labor force due to direct care challenges.
- Undervaluing care work imposes significant public costs on our state, as low wages lead more workers to rely on public assistance programs, including MaineCare and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). Meanwhile, the drop in labor force participation due to direct care responsibilities means fewer workers are contributing taxes. These combine to cost our state and federal budgets more than \$70 million each year.
- Direct care workforce shortages place undue strains on Maine's health care system. In March 2023, Maine Medical Center had about 50 people under its care who were approved for discharge but could not find an alternative care setting; meanwhile, Northern Light Health noted that over a nearly six-month period, the cost of delayed discharges across the system's hospitals totaled \$13.6 million and amounted to approximately \$63,000 per person.

¹ "The High Cost of Undervaluing Direct Care Work," MECEP, April 2023,
<https://essentialworkforce.org/2023/04/the-high-cost-of-undervaluing-direct-care-work-2/>

Personal Support Services include a wide range of activities from helping with basic personal hygiene and making food to ensuring cleanliness in the home and providing a social outlet for those who feel isolated. While these services may seem inconsequential, they are critical to the health and well-being of so many of our family members, neighbors, and friends.

Sadly, there is a severe shortage in this workforce. For example, over 23,500 hours of approved home care for older adults go undelivered each week² and this un-provided care results in the economic and human costs mentioned above.

Any investments we can make that grow this workforce are smart investments and I urge you to support LD 327.

Thank you for all your careful consideration of the priorities in front of you. Our partnership is committed to serving as a trusted resource on this critical workforce.

Brenda Peluso

bpeluso@mainecouncilonaging.org

<https://essentialworkforce.org/>

² "Closing the Gap: Maine's Direct Care Shortage and Solutions to Fix It," MECEP, June 2024, <https://essentialworkforce.org/2024/06/the-partnership-launches-its-second-report/>