



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

Delivered on March 28, 2025

Neither For Nor Against LD 980 - Resolve, to Create the Commission to Improve the Oversight of the Long-term Care System

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyers, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing 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.

LD 980 seeks to address concerns the bill sponsor and we hold in common; however, because the majority of the regulations for long-term care are driven by the federal Centers for Medicaid Services (CMS), we would recommend focusing on areas where state government has more ability to influence outcomes. One of those areas is workforce development.

As you know, Maine's Essential Care & Support Workforce Partnership has been working diligently with the legislature, the Administration, and stakeholders to address the acute and ongoing workforce shortage. We still have ground to cover to meet current needs, let alone needs of the future.

For example, according to the Maine Center for Economic Policy, the workforce shortage has resulted in at least 23,500 hours per week of home care for older Mainers going unserved. They estimate we need at least another 2,300 workers just to meet this current need, and another 37,000 to join the ranks over the next decade.

The shortage in the direct care workforce is also putting strain on family caregivers and our economy. I would imagine that most people in this room today know someone or are someone who has experienced this lack of affordable or available care for a loved one. And because so many have left the workforce due to caregiving needs, the Maine Center on Economic Policy estimates that there is an annual loss to the Maine GDP of over \$1 Billion.

This workforce is the backbone for the continuum of care that affords older Mainers and Mainers with disabilities a variety of lifestyle choices. While many people will choose to remain at home, for some that is not an option and the availability of long term care is essential. Because our direct care workforce is already strained, many Maine people who need assistance with activities of daily living are facing serious challenges, including worsened physical and mental health, higher risk of falls and injuries, hospitalization, neglect, institutionalization, and even homelessness and death.

Maine's commitment to helping grow the essential care and support workforce is starting to finally show some promising but limited success and we appreciate all efforts that will address our critical workforce shortage.

Thank you, Brenda Peluso

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<https://essentialworkforce.org/>

For more information and sources, please see:

- "Efforts and Progress on Implementing the Recommendations of the Commission to Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues: Third Annual Report Pursuant to PL 2021, c. 398, Section AAAA-7," Maine Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Aging and Disability Services, February 2024, <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/inline-files/Efforts-Progress-Implementing-Recommendations-Commission-to-Study-LTSS-Workforce-Issues-3rd-annual.pdf>
- "LD 898: Essential Support Workforce Advisory Committee, 2024 Annual Report," The Essential Support Workforce Advisory Committee (ESWAC), January 2025, <https://www.maine.gov/labor/docs/2025/eswa/LD8982024ReportforCommittee.pdf>
- "Closing the Gap: Maine's Direct Care Shortage and Solutions to Fix It," Maine Center for Economic Policy (MECEP), June 2024, <https://essentialworkforce.org/2024/06/the-partnership-launches-its-second-report/>, and
- "The High Cost of Undervaluing Direct Care Work," Maine Center for Economic Policy (MECEP), April 2023, <https://essentialworkforce.org/2023/04/the-high-cost-of-undervaluing-direct-care-work-2/>