



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

Delivered on April 1, 2025

In Favor of LD 977 - Resolve, Authorizing the Maine Health Data Organization to Develop a Plan for Measuring Gaps in Home and Community Based Services

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.

I am testifying in favor of LD 977 as it aligns perfectly with our goals to have better data in order to make better decisions about one of the most significant areas of spending and services annually.

The Partnership is focused on advancing cross-sector solutions to close the growing gap between those who need care and support and those available to provide it. We also seek to understand the health, wellbeing, and economic impact of unmet care needs - both for individuals and for the State - so that we can target interventions where they will be most effective. The Partnership has commissioned two reports from the Maine Center for Economic Policy, cited below, that also highlight the need for this data.

Regular, consistent, and accessible data is critical for assessing which interventions are most successful in shrinking the gap and improving health and wellbeing. Here are a few examples of the indicators of success that we think are critical to measure, but for which data isn't readily available or isn't collected:

- What is the ratio of approved hours versus utilized hours? Understanding this gap is essential to assessing unmet needs, ensuring budget allocations reflect actual service usage, and reducing the need for frequent emergency adjustments to MaineCare.
- How many facility beds are offline due to staffing challenges and where are they located?
- What is happening to individuals who have been approved for care and are not receiving it?

MaineCare and the reimbursements to providers who employ the essential care & support workforce are the foundation of our health care system. Together, they ensure access to essential services - services that allow Maine people to live with dignity and wellbeing. 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.

Having better data is critical to designing effective solutions to this growing crisis. We strongly support this approach and urge you to vote Ought to Pass. Additionally, we look forward to a forthcoming bill from Speaker Fecteau which, among other provisions, would direct MHDO to outline available data, identify gaps, and estimate the cost of creating and implementing a uniform data collection and reporting system on Maine's "care gap."

Thank you for all your careful consideration of the priorities in front of you.

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<https://essentialworkforce.org/>

For more information and sources, please see "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/>, and "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/>