

Kathy Rickards
Brunswick
LD 1932

Testimony of Kathy Rickards, Brunswick, Maine in Support of LD 1932 "An Act to Support Essential Support Workers and Enhance Workforce Development
Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Kathy Rickards and as the worried, aging mother of a 45-year-old son with complex intellectual, medical, and mental health disabilities, and the daughter of a 99-year-old mother in assisted living, the workforce crisis hits our family doubly hard. With an original authorization date of July 2018, the Legislature has grappled with the long-term care crisis and I am grateful for the bipartisan work that has laid the framework for LD 1932. The dire effects of inadequate reimbursement for DSP's, both for my family and so many others across Maine, has led directly to increased instances of neglect, inconsistency for a population that relies on known caregivers and routine, as well as higher rates of med errors and instances of inadequate or dangerous care. Both my son and my mother have been victimized by a system of care that is stretched too thin. Too many of our aging Maine neighbors and those with disabilities are now reliant on their families who cannot possibly meet the increasing needs of their loved ones, as they themselves face age related issues. With the closure of nursing homes and over 100 group homes due to inadequate rates, it is clearly time to act.

DSP's provide the very foundation of life for people with disabilities and aging Mainers. We owe them a livable wage for the heroic work they do. The DSP's who support my mother and my son struggle to meet their own basic needs because of not only the inadequate compensation, but because they work too many hours of overtime in a highly stressful field. DSP's often come to work even when ill, as they know that care won't be available if they do not. However, this increases risk to medically fragile aging and disabled Mainers. DSP's are often unable to afford reliable transportation, have to forego medical care and prescription medicine, and struggle to pay for groceries, rent, and heat. Because of the extremely high turnover rate, my mother and son often have their most intimate care provided by someone who they are just meeting. This is not a safe solution for anyone! We must invest now in order to ensure a continuity of care for our most vulnerable Maine neighbors. I ask you to fully support LD 1932 that will provide efficient and effective common-sense solutions to the long-term care crisis.

Thank you for this opportunity,
Kathy Rickards
Brunswick, Maine 04011
Mother, Daughter
Board Member of Independence Association
Member of the Maine Essential Care and Support Workforce Partnership