January 20, 2026

Re: LD 1932 An Act to Support Essential Support Workers and Enhance Workforce Development

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

My name is Vickey Merrill, and I am the Advocacy Director at Community Housing of Maine (CHOM). CHOM is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to creating permanent, affordable housing and supportive communities for people with complex needs, including individuals with disabilities, older adults, and people who have experienced homelessness. I am here today to testify in strong support of LD 1932.

At CHOM, we see firsthand that housing stability is inseparable from the availability of a strong, well-supported essential support workforce. Essential support workers are the backbone of our long-term care and community-based services systems. They make it possible for people to remain safely housed, avoid more intensive and costly care settings, and live with dignity in their communities. Yet despite their critical role, these workers are chronically underpaid, overextended, and too often forced to leave the field altogether.

LD 1932 takes meaningful, thoughtful steps to address this long-standing workforce crisis. First, increasing the labor portion of reimbursement from 125% to 140% of the minimum wage, while maintaining a floor of at least 125% for workers paid through MaineCare or state-funded programs, is a necessary and overdue adjustment. Current reimbursement rates simply do not reflect the reality of today's labor market or the skill, responsibility, and emotional labor required of essential support workers. Without competitive wages, providers cannot recruit or retain staff, and individuals approved for services go without the care they need.

This bill also wisely recognizes that we cannot solve what we do not accurately measure. LD 1932 would direct the State to use the findings and recommendations of the Maine Health Data Organization's Care Gap report to assess the gap between approved services and services actually delivered, and to plan intentionally around those gaps. By grounding policy decisions in this data, the bill brings greater accountability to a system that has long operated with incomplete information. This brings further accountability to a system that has long relied on incomplete data. CHOM sees the effects of this gap frequently: residents approved for services that cannot be staffed, families forced into crises that could have been avoided, and housing placements destabilized because supports are unavailable.

Additionally, the bill's requirement that the Department of Administrative and Financial Services produce a biennial report estimating the true cost of long-term care services and forecasting future costs is a critical planning tool. Maine's population is aging, the need for services is growing, not investing now only increases costs downstream – through hospitalizations, institutional care, and housing instability.

We also strongly support the bill's expanded stakeholder engagement, including adding representatives from the long-term care ombudsman program and home-based personal

care providers to the Essential Support Workforce Advisory Committee. These perspectives are essential to ensuring that policy decisions are grounded in lived experience and operational reality.

Finally, LD 1932 looks to the future. The creation of an Innovations in Care and Support Technology Plan and a five-year plan to expand worker portability and advancement reflects an understanding that workforce challenges require both immediate action and long-term systems thinking. Standardized training, career pathways, and smart use of technology can reduce unstaffed hours while improving quality of care and job satisfaction.

This bill is not only about workforce policy – it is about housing stability, public health, and fiscal responsibility. When essential support services fail, housing fails. When housing fails, costs shift to emergency rooms, shelters, and institutions – these systems are already overburdened. LD 1932 helps interrupt that cycle by investing in the people who make community-based care possible.

Essential support workers deserve wages, training, and systems that reflect the value of their work. The people who rely on these services deserve reliability and continuity of care. LD 1932 moves Maine meaningfully closer to both.

I respectfully urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1932.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.