

January 19th, 2026

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

Dear Members of the Maine Legislature,

I was born and raised in Maine, a state that taught me the fundamental value of community. This commitment to service is my family legacy: my mother served as the sole family practice doctor in Bingham for 29 years, and my father spent his career counseling men through domestic violence intervention. After living in Vermont for eight years, I returned home because I wanted to contribute to the society that shaped me.

For 17 years, I have served as a mental health provider for Maine's most vulnerable populations. My career has spanned homeless outreach, refugee services, and elementary education. Currently, I work in Portland with the intellectually disabled community. In my current role at a music-based program, I witness miracles: I have seen individuals who were once too afraid to leave their homes transform into confident performers on a public stage.

I want to continue this work. I work full-time to support my community, yet I cannot afford my rent in Portland without a second job. This leaves me overextended and chronically stressed—conditions that directly compromise the quality of care I can provide to my clients.

I am not an outlier. I know many dedicated professionals who want to stay in Maine and support our most vulnerable neighbors, but we are being priced out of our own lives. We provide an essential safety net for the state, yet we are paid a wage that does not cover basic daily needs. Consequently, I am watching brilliant, compassionate providers leave the field for corporate roles simply to survive.

If you, as our leaders, do not find a way to support the Direct Service workforce with a livable wage, then we cannot claim that "community health" is a Maine value. You cannot expect the most frayed parts of our social fabric to hold together when the people holding them are being ignored. When the sectors that need you most are left to struggle in poverty, trust in leadership erodes.

I am asking you to prioritize a wage increase for Direct Service Professionals. Help us stay in the state we love, doing the work that Maine needs.

Thank you for your time and your service to our state.

Sincerely,

Tim McLaughlin, LMSW-CC, DSP

Portland, ME