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Testimony submitted to the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services - LD 1932 -
An Act to Support Essential Support Workers and Enhance Workforce Development

Senator Ingwerson and Representative Meyer, co-chairs, and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Ron Phillips, a resident of Waldoboro. As a volunteer of AARP Maine, I wish to give my support to LD 1932. It is an important bill for all Maine residents, and particularly the elderly and family caregivers. As you know Maine is a state with the oldest population in the nation. As such, family caregivers along with essential caregivers are and will be even more critical as the years go by.

I became more sharply aware of the challenges homecare workers face from my own direct experience as a family caregiver. Over a recent five-year period – which is also the average number of years a family caretaker spends - I took care of my spouse of 62 years, 24/7, involving all levels of care that could be provided in the home, including administering morphine. I became acutely aware of the vital role not only essential workers play in homecare and advising and directing the family caregiver, but also, my role as a family member caring for a loved one.

Among the merits of this bipartisan proposed legislation is to increase the reimbursement rate under Maine Care to 140 percent of Maine's minimum wage. There are some 24,000 direct care workers in Maine who could be affected by such an increase. Maine's current minimum wage is \$15.10/hour. This would bring the essential worker's wage to \$21.14/hour, much closer to MIT's living wage calculator of \$23.22 for our region of Maine for an adult to attain a basic standard of living. This rate is way beyond the unrealistic federal minimum wage of \$7.25 based largely on 1960 cost-of-living.

Second, I call your attention to the comprehensive research report on the *State of Caregiving in the U.S. 2025* conducted by national AARP and the National Association for Caregiving.. A summary of the 131 page research report including appendices is also attached. The report notes that over 63 million family and friends are involved in some way providing care for a family member, 89 percent of whom are caring for a spouse, partner or relative. While there are some federal and/or state programs that reimburse family caregivers for some portion of care, much remains to be considered on where financial support can be extended, and where the essential workers' role can be more adequately supplemented by compensating a family member's caregiving.

For example, under the federally-proposed *Credit for Care Act of 2025* – actually introduced in pre-covid Congress in 2019 - AARP along with other senior and family health advocates are proposing a nonrefundable, 30 percent tax credit up to \$5,000 for households filing a joint return of no more than \$150,000 on their IRS 1040. The research report documents that some 70 percent of households earning above \$50,000 would take advantage of such a credit. There are an estimate

166,000 family caregivers active in Maine. With a 2024 median household income of around \$90,000 many households in Maine could benefit.

Sorting through the myriad ways to understand the complexity - let alone to monetize - the continuum of caregiving in the U.S., is not for the faint-hearted. However, taking a step in this direction could be advanced by LD 1932's Section 8 which reads *Innovations to Care and Support Technology Plan*. This section calls for a stakeholder group to be formed to study innovations in technologies, such as telehealth, monitoring systems and other technical aids, that can contribute to efficiencies to enhance homecare tasks. If we could insert "Family" to this section so it reads: *Innovations to Care and Support Technology and Family Plan* - and define the tasks of the stakeholder group accordingly - the door could be opened to look at ways the state, let alone federal tax system, can be directed to strengthen the caregiving infrastructure in Maine and the nation.

In conclusion it seems to me the 324,000 care givers in Maine's workforce would benefit by a more robust family caregiver system to supplement their duties. Homecare workers, palliative and hospice providers do and can even more so boost family caregivers' skills in the multiple levels of Activities Daily Living (ADL) including end-of- life care.

It feels counterintuitive to monetize love in this way, but given the political predilection to use the tax code for presumed public good, offering tax credits and paying a living wage for caregiving seems a no-brainer.

Thank you.

Ron Phillips