

Testimony of Diane Boas, Cape Elizabeth
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 Diane Boas and I’m submitting testimony in support of LD 1932 “An Act to Support Essential Support Workers and Enhance Workforce Development”.

I am the mother of an adult son who lives in a group home in South Portland. My son has complex needs including chronic physical health issues and a mental health disorder. At present, my son is stable – in large part because over the last few years he has benefitted from consistent staff. But that can change in an instant, as I have seen his world come crashing down with the loss of a trusted DSP.

Caring for my son can be hard. He has a history of challenging behaviors which led to police intervention and frequent trips to Maine Health’s Emergency Department. I am grateful that to date his agency has been able to find workers who are compassionate and committed to providing quality care. There is a direct connection between my son’s physical and mental health and the stability and training of his staff. Importantly my son’s relationship with his staff has fostered an increase in his independence and allowed him to access a multitude of community activities. But how long can we expect DSPs to do this vital but difficult work when they can find easier employment that pays more? We must show DSPs that we value their work

As my son ages, his health needs are becoming more complicated. Having well trained and consistent staff has become more imperative as well. At the same time, my husband and I are aging – we are 70 and 75. We are increasingly fearful about what will happen to our son when our own health is compromised. We worry constantly about whether there will be a strong, reliable system of care in place when we are gone.

Passage of LD 1932 is an important step towards building and reinforcing the direct support workforce that cares for individuals like my son. LD will help stabilize the system of care now and for the future. Maine needs to pay caregivers a living wage that respects the value of the work they do. The need is especially great for aging parents like us.

Thank you.