



Testimony of Tricia Flanders

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

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

January 20, 2026

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 1932: *An Act to Support Essential Support Workers and Enhance Workforce Development*.

My name is Tricia Flanders. I am the Chief Human Resources Officer of 3Rivers. The mission of our agency is to empower and support people with disabilities to live purposeful, connected lives by promoting independence, dignity, and inclusion.

3Rivers is a statewide nonprofit organization that supports people with disabilities throughout Maine, with services grounded in the local communities where individuals live. We serve people in both rural and urban areas, including small towns and larger communities across the state. Our staff work alongside individuals in their homes, workplaces, and neighborhoods, supporting meaningful participation in community life through a wide range of services. Currently, 3Rivers supports approximately 500 individuals across Maine with the dedication of 271 direct support and care staff, along with 13 non-direct care staff who provide essential facilities, housekeeping, and dietary services.

3Rivers has a long history of supporting people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in their homes and communities, and our ability to deliver consistent, high-quality services depends on a stable and skilled direct care workforce. I began working in this field in April 2024, but disability services have held a special place in my heart for much longer. Two of my cousins are individuals who receive these services and supports, and as a teenager—more than 30 years ago—I witnessed firsthand the challenges my family faced trying to fill and retain direct care staff. Unfortunately, decades later, those challenges remain largely unchanged. It is far past time for us to become serious about paying direct care staff appropriately.

Today, community-based providers like 3Rivers are operating in a workforce crisis. Nationally, turnover rates for direct care staff remain at approximately 40–50%, and vacancy rates continue to rise, with as many as one in eight positions unfilled. These realities are reflected locally at 3Rivers, where recruitment and retention challenges have resulted in significant overtime costs and have required many committed employees to work multiple jobs to meet their financial needs while ensuring services remain staffed. This instability impacts not only workers, but also the individuals and families who rely on consistent, trusted relationships for safe and effective care.

In Maine, these pressures are intensified by competition for workers—particularly in the southern region of the state—from large employers such as Market Basket, Chick-fil-A, Costco, and others that offer highly competitive wages, predictable schedules, and benefits. Without establishing a wage floor that ensures direct care staff are paid at least 125% of the minimum wage, community-based providers remain at a significant disadvantage in recruiting and retaining the workforce necessary to support people with complex and ongoing

needs. This challenge has been further compounded by the absence of a full cost-of-living adjustment in the 2025 biennial budget, which continues to erode real wages.

Despite these challenges, 3Rivers operates with a lean administrative structure—only 18.9% of our workforce is administrative staff supporting essential functions such as billing, finance, quality, and human resources. This intentionally low percentage reflects our commitment to directing the vast majority of resources toward frontline, direct care staff rather than behind-the-scenes roles. Even with this focus, without meaningful wage investment, workforce instability will persist.

Competitive wages are not optional; they are essential to stabilizing and growing the direct care workforce, reducing reliance on overtime, improving retention, and ensuring people with disabilities receive the consistent, high-quality services they deserve. For these reasons, 3Rivers respectfully urges the Legislature to support LD 1932 and make a meaningful investment in the workforce that makes community-based disability services possible.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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