

**Testimony of Hannah Parsons, York County Creative Trails**

**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 Hannah Parsons. I live in Portland, Maine and I am a Direct Support Professional at York County Creative Trails in Biddeford and a member of Maine’s Essential Care & Support Workforce Partnership. The Partnership is a broad coalition of providers, workers, caregivers and family members working for a strong and supported workforce.

Today, I’m submitting testimony in support of LD 1932 “An Act to Support Essential Support Workers and Enhance Workforce Development”. First I'd like to acknowledge the work that has already been done over the last 5 years to lift up this issue facing essential care and support for the workforce. Thank you to the Legislature and to the speaker Fecteau.

The people who work at York County Creative Trails are there because they share a passion with the individuals they serve, a passion for art and music. Something that I hold to believe is one of the best inventions of mankind, and many people's purpose in life. Creation, especially in artistic forms, is a form of expression. For those who have been misunderstood and felt voiceless for most of their lives, this type of expression is incredibly important for their wellbeing, health, and soul. To be somebody who is offered the opportunity to help people with IDD express themselves, to encourage them and to see them, it is an honor and privilege to be trusted with those parts of them. While our day to day activities might not seem

as deep and special as I make them out to be to the outside eye, there are special moments that highlight and really put on display the work that's being done underneath. When a participant creates a song about their mental health struggles, or when they finally find their niche that inspires them and brings more joy to their life. The act of expressing yourself creatively is a therapeutic act for many people. These individuals who might not have been able to be supported in exploring and growing skills in artistic expression are able to do that here, because of the workers who care and are trained accordingly to accommodate their needs. Getting better pay would make our ability to show up for these individuals better and make more of a daily impact on them. Research supports this reality. Dal Bó et al. (2013) found that when employers offer higher wages, they attract applicants who are not only more skilled, but also more motivated and better matched to the work, and that higher pay improves retention of productive workers. This means with better applicants and better retention, we could find employees who might be a better match for participants, as well as keep them and build stronger longer lasting relationships. At the same time, studies demonstrate that financial insecurity undermines job performance. Mani et al. (2013) showed that when individuals are under economic stress, their cognitive performance declines, particularly when faced with unexpected expenses. When essential support workers are struggling to meet their own basic needs, it becomes harder to fully focus on the complex, emotionally demanding work we are asked to do.

LD 1932 is an investment not only in workers, but in the people and communities we serve. By strengthening wages and workforce development, this bill would improve retention, enhance quality of care, and ensure that individuals with disabilities continue to receive the thoughtful, consistent support they deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and for your commitment to Maine's essential care and support workforce.

Hannah Parsons

York County Creative Trails

#### Citations

1. Bó, Ernesto Dal, Frederico Finan, and Martín A. Rossi. 2013. Strengthening State Capabilities: The Role of Financial Incentives in the Call to Public Service. *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 128, no. 3: 1169–218.
2. Mani, Anandi, Sendhil Mullainathan, Eldar Shafir, and Jiaying Zhao. 2013. Poverty Impedes Cognitive Function. *Science* 341, no. 6149: 976–80.