**Health and Human Services Public Hearing:** LD 1932—An Act to Support Essential Support Workers and Enhance Workforce Development

**Date:** January 20, 2026

**Oral Statement of:** PHI, 261 Madison Ave, Suite 913, New York, NY 10016

I am Jake McDonald, Senior Policy Advocacy Specialist at PHI, a national nonprofit organization that has spent over 35 years working to strengthen the direct care workforce. I am speaking in support of LD 1932.

In our work across the country, we have seen state after state grapple with the same fundamental challenge: how to build and sustain the workforce that cares for our aging parents, our neighbors with disabilities, and community members facing behavioral health challenges. Maine is not alone in facing this crisis, but with this bill, Maine has an opportunity to lead.

Maine's direct care workers are the backbone of the state's care and support systems and its economy. Yet, the workforce is in crisis due to poor job quality: inadequate wages, barriers to entry and advancement, and a system that too often budgets and plans as if the workforce shortage does not exist.[1] As a result, people who qualify for services cannot reliably receive them, family caregivers are forced to fill gaps, and providers struggle to recruit and retain staff. This is not simply a workforce problem—it is an access-to-care and economic stability crisis for Maine families and communities. Right now, in Maine, an estimated 23,500 hours of authorized care go unfilled every single week.[2] These are not abstract numbers—they represent real people not getting the support they need to bathe, eat, or participate in their communities. This care gap exists because we have not yet invested adequately in the people who do this work.

Nearly one-third of Maine's direct care workers live in poverty.[3] Forty-two percent rely on public benefits just to make ends meet.[4] These workers are caught in an impossible situation: they are essential to our long-term care system, yet they are paid wages that make it nearly impossible to support their own families.

What makes LD 1932 significant from a national perspective is its more comprehensive approach, which should serve as a model for the country. Too often, states address workforce challenges in a piecemeal fashion. This bill does something different. It tackles wages. It modernizes training and credentialing to create real career pathways. It harnesses technology to improve service delivery. And, critically, it requires the state to actually measure and budget for Maine's full care needs.

This integrated approach reflects what the research tells us: you cannot solve the direct care workforce crisis by pulling just one lever. Workers need better wages, but they also need a more universal training and credentialing system that is transparent and accessible, provides stackable, portable credentials, and supports career advancement. And the state needs accurate data to plan for the future.

Maine's population is aging faster than nearly any other state in the nation.[5] The demand for care will only grow. By passing LD 1932, you can help ensure that Maine has the workforce it needs—not just today, but in the years ahead. You can also show the nation what it looks like when policymakers take the direct care workforce crisis seriously.

Thank you.

# Notes

[1] Maine Center for Economic Policy, Phillips, Arthur, and Josie Phillips. 2023. The High Cost of Undervaluing Direct Care Work. https://www.mecep.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/The-High-Cost-of-Undervaluing-Direct-Care-Work.pdf.

[2] Maine Center for Economic Policy, Phillips, Arthur. 2024. Closing the Gap: Maine's Direct Care Shortage and Solutions to Fix It. https://www.mecep.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Maines-Direct-Care-Shortage-and-Solutions-to-Fix-It.pdf.

[3] PHI. 2026. "Workforce Data Center." https://phinational.org/policy-research/workforce-data-center/.

[4] PHI. 2026.

[5] Next Avenue, Trutor, Clayton. 2025. The State of Aging in the Nationl's Oldest State: Maine. https://www.nextavenue.org/state-aging-in-oldest-state-maine/.