

Regarding: 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 Joann White, and I am a Direct Support Professional with Woodfords Family Services. I currently work at the Adult Community Support program, Expeditions, where across two programs over 80 adults with intellectual disabilities are supported. I am here in strong support of LD 1932, sponsored by Speaker of the House Ryan Fecteau and supported by the Essential Care & Support Workforce Partnership.

As Direct Support Professionals, we perform many roles throughout the day; but one of the most important is showing the individuals we support that they are valued, accepted, and that they matter. Many of the people we serve have experienced trauma, instability, and neglect. For them, simply getting through the day can feel overwhelming.

Some have never had consistent access to the basic needs that we at times take advantage of; a safe home, food, clean clothes, or adults they could trust. Our role is not just supervision. We teach people how to live.

We support individuals with basic life skills such as hygiene, cooking, budgeting, job skills, health, wellness, physical activity and appropriate community interactions. On any given day, we may be counselors, teachers, advocates, friends, or a calm and safe presence. We also provide hands-on personal care; assisting with person care, teeth brushing brushing teeth, basic hair care, and ensuring people are dressed appropriately for the weather. We plan and implement individualized schedules, activities, and skill-building supports based on each person's needs and goals. The amount of people per day that we support with skill building & life skills varies from 15-20 people per day.

This is skilled, demanding, and essential work; yet it is consistently undervalued.

I want to share what that looks like personally. I work full time, Monday through Friday, as a Direct Support Professional. Even so, I still need to work a part-time job at a grocery store just to pay my bills. There are times when, after covering rent, utilities, and basic expenses, I am left with only fifteen to twenty dollars to live on until my next paycheck arrives two weeks later.

That is the reality for many workers in this field. Hard working, caring & supportive DSP's are forced to leave the field due to not being able to be afforded a livable wage.

Years of underinvestment have resulted in low wages, high turnover, and workforce shortages. Workers experience financial insecurity and burnout. People receiving services lose trusted staff and experience disrupted care. Participants that have families available are forced to step in when programs can't remain staffed or open. For those who don't have families; their futures become uncertain.

This crisis extends beyond individual households. Approximately 8,000 Mainers are currently out of the workforce because they must care for family members when services are unavailable — contributing to an estimated \$1 billion in lost economic activity each year.

Providers want to pay workers competitively, but their ability to do so is directly tied to MaineCare reimbursement rates, which have not kept pace with rising labor costs or annual increases to the minimum wage.

LD 1932 provides a clear, responsible solution.

~~The bill increases the labor component of MaineCare direct service rates to 140% of the minimum wage, allowing providers to offer real wage increases. It also establishes a wage floor, ensuring essential support workers are paid at least 125% of the state minimum wage, creating fairness and stability across the system.~~

~~Too often, workers are forced to choose between meaningful work and financial survival. LD 1932 helps prevent that choice.~~

When workers are paid fairly, turnover decreases, programs stay open, and relationships between workers and the people they support are preserved. ~~These relationships are critical to safety, independence, and community inclusion for Mainers with disabilities.~~ Quality pay will result in quality staff & supports for those who need it the most.

Direct care and support workers are the backbone of Maine's care economy. Investing in this workforce prevents costly institutional care, strengthens families, and saves public dollars over time.

When workers thrive, the people we support thrive — and Maine thrives.

I respectfully urge you to support LD 1932.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

~~Joann White~~