

Testimony of Celeste Turner

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. I also wish to thank Speaker Fecteau and Bill sponsors for supporting this workforce and direct care services through this bill.

My name is Celeste Turner. I am the parent and legal guardian of adult with Intellectual Disabilities who receives residential and community supports through LEAP Inc. of Farmington, Maine and whose community employment is supported by Work First, also of Farmington, Maine. She has been supported by these services since 1998, and has lived in a LEAP operated home since 2012.

The programs and services provided by these and related agencies depend on Essential Care and/or Support Workers otherwise known as Direct Care Workers or Providers. Although these workers are critical to the operation of these agencies, their wages suffer from inadequate investment resources.

Low Wages

Low Wages result in high staff turnover and chronic workforce shortages. The workers face financial insecurity. The number of essential support workers enrolled in SNAP is estimated to be 1 in 5. The burnout rate is high. Families may have to step in to fill the gaps resulting in lack of adequate service. The broader State economy suffers due to having approximately 8,000 of these family members currently out of the work force. Most of all, individuals receiving care have their services interrupted or discontinued. In 2024, at least 23,500 hours per week of home care for older adults went unserved. Maine forfeits \$1 billion in economic activity due to fewer workers paying taxes.

MaineCare Rates

Providers' hands are tied. They want to pay higher wages, but they are bound by MaineCare reimbursement rates. These are often insufficiently adjusted or delayed. The result is stagnant wages for essential workers.

The Reality

Let me address how I see the impact of these wage discrepancies. The Direct Support Providers are the backbone of Programs and Services. These workers go through significant training. They learn about the residents or participants in order to best address their specialized needs. They establish rapport and form relationships with them. They support their skills development and celebrate their accomplishments. They also establish some level of relationship with the Parents/Guardians/Friends. Then, too often, they leave. They don't want to. The people they support don't want them too. But when you are working a job that requires specialized training and skills, is it too much to expect to be paid a living wage?

LD 1932

So LD 1932 proposes to correct these issues. Too often workers are forced to choose between a job they love and find meaningful and a job that just pays the bills. LD 1932 helps prevent that choice. The bill raises the labor component of MaineCare direct services rates to 140% of minimum wage. Providers will have the necessary resources to offer real wage increases. When workers are paid a competitive wage turnover decreases, programs stay open, relationships between providers and those served are established and preserved. A better paid workforce is a better staffed workforce improving outcomes for those with disabilities. People stay safely supported in their homes and in their communities. And when workers thrive, the people supported thrive and the community at large thrives.

These are the reasons why I ask you to support LD 1932. Thank You for your time and consideration.

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