

Testimony of Ellis Levesque

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 Ellis Levesque. I am a Direct Support Professional (DSP), and I work for a residential LEAP home in Farmington, Maine. During my 3 years working for LEAP I have taken on a tremendous amount of responsibility. During my first year I worked during the afternoons facilitating the individuals' access to the community, to their friends and family. This requires an extensive amount of focus and effort, carefully managing my own emotions while keeping an eye out for anything that could become a trigger for any individual entrusted to me. After taking them out in the community and doing my best to maintain an emphasis on their safety, health, and growth as a person. After this I switched over to doing an overnight position instead, coming in at 9pm and maintaining the house, ensuring everyone's safety, and encouraging healthy choices. I have taken great lengths to ensure I treat each of these people as individuals who deserve kindness, respect, and a safe environment while I assist them with their daily tasks. Even the simplest things that most people take for granted: using the bathroom, eating, taking medication, preparing food, and maintaining a healthy sleep schedule can all present different areas of struggle for those who need the type of support we provide. All of these things need to be approached with care and consideration. It requires careful documentation, focus, and a work ethic that is capable of taking on more nuances challenges like conflict de-escalation.

I have seen these people at their best and at their worst and everything in between, and I have seen the effects of burnout that consume the staff. The house I work at is always understaffed. The only reason things have been able to run smoothly enough as things are is due to the hard work, dedication, and adaptability of the few staff members we can retain. These are some of the kindest and most empathetic coworkers I have ever had the pleasure of working with. They show up every single day they are called upon

to give their all in service of these supported individuals no matter what struggles they might be facing in their own lives. These are people who, with no expectation of anything more than the wages they deserve, will go above and beyond to think of solutions to problems that a percentage of the population hasn't even considered. These of course include day to day care, but what about helping to explore career options? Finding adaptive methods of integrating these people into the larger community? Ensuring that with every decision these individuals make, they understand what it is they are deciding on and how it would actually impact them. Things of this nature require hard conversations and an immense amount of empathy and emotional constitution.

I spend so much time focusing on the challenges people who work in a position like mine face because I want to highlight the expectations. There is so much responsibility placed upon our shoulders, and this is before even considering the amount of careful documentation and trainings we are told to complete. Any medical errors have to be careful catalogued and reported by us individually, we have to be keeping up on navigating the various different doctors and pharmacies that provide services to our individuals, we are expected to facilitate their access to medical care and document their visits, to keep a careful eye on their health and safety in every given situation no matter what. We are expected to do all of these things with a positive and encouraging attitude because it is the best way to help our individuals improve their lives the most. We have all of these expectations placed on our shoulders, and still, every staff member I have worked with is struggling to keep up with the world financially. We are constantly understaffed, overworked, and burned out. As for me personally, every single paycheck disappears almost as soon as it arrives, my biweekly pay barely covering everything needed in-between paychecks. Constantly playing financial catchup and always just barely making it through to the next paycheck with hardly anything to speak of for savings. An emergency would make me completely broke on almost any given day. I am expected to have a reliable source of transportation and yet if my car were to break down there would be a 50/50 chance I would have the money to get it towed and fixed on a given day should something happen.

If it weren't for the generosity of LEAP with the assistance of the free Hannaford gift cards and the food pantry I would not have had an adequate amount of money to be able to eat and maintain my car payments, pay for rent, electricity, internet, and keep up with medical expenses. Even with those assistances I find I often have to neglect one of those responsibilities almost every month. I can only imagine what the financial situation is for the other staff members who also have the additional expenses that

come with having children. I can see in my interactions, and I can feel in myself, that all of us are burning ourselves out here trying to tread water in a turbulent and rapidly worsening economy. If things continue I fear the only DSPs there will be left will be people working for private practice; something which the majority of people that need our support would not be able to afford on their own. They cannot pay out of pocket for individual workers. These individuals we support sometimes do not have families or friends that would be able to support them adequately on their own and if there is no workforce to take over and provide closely considered 1 on 1 assistance to these people, to carefully make and adapt to their always changing circumstances, this will only lead to less people being able to access the accommodations they need. This will only lead to more economic hardship for everyone, as well as a lesser ability to get a stable support network. As more houses close (as we've already been seeing in LEAP) job opportunities begin shrinking further. The less people we have working these jobs, the worse our ability to support people who need it, the less these very people we support can get out in the community and participate not only in daily socialization but also the economy.

Please, not just for the sake of the staff working at these places, but for the people these staff come in to support day in and day out, support LD 1932. The wage increase would lessen the burden on so many of these people who do one of the most challenging and important jobs that currently exist. We cannot keep going and supporting people who need help if we ourselves are not living in a place of financial security.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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