



**Testimony of Angela Westhoff, President & CEO  
Maine Health Care Association**

Testimony before the Committee on Health and Human Services In Support of  
*LD 1932, An Act to Support Essential Support Workers and Enhance Workforce Development*  
January 20, 2026 at 1:00 PM

Senator Ingwersen and Representative Meyer as well as Distinguished Members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Angela Westhoff, and I serve as the President & CEO of the Maine Health Care Association. We represent approximately 200 nursing homes, assisted living centers, and residential care facilities across the state. Our mission is to empower members to ensure the integrity, quality, and sustainability of long term care in Maine.

I am pleased to submit testimony in support of **LD 1932, An Act to Support Essential Support Workers and Enhance Workforce Development**. This bill increases the labor portion of the reimbursement rate for services provided by essential support workers from 125% of the minimum wage to 140%, including wages, benefits, and taxes. It is no secret that Maine's long term care facilities are struggling- due in large part to a historic work force crisis. Since 2014, Maine has experienced 29 nursing home closures, with 16 closures since 2021 alone. In addition, 28 residential care facilities have closed since 2014. In 1995, there were 132 nursing homes in Maine. Today there are just 78 and Hancock County has no nursing homes left. The three main causes of closures are 1.) inadequate reimbursement rates 2.) workforce shortages and 3.) inflation increasing the cost of delivering care.

Nursing homes and residential care facilities employ a significant number of certified nurse aides and personal support specialists to help care for the thousands of older and disabled adults

living in these care centers. We estimate that we lost 10-15% of direct care workers during the pandemic and work force levels have still not recovered. The lack of staff will compromise our ability to provide long term care services to meet the demand of our aging population.

An increase in the labor portion of the MaineCare (Medicaid) reimbursement rate would allow centers to be able to pay direct caregivers at least 125% of minimum wage. Over 70% of long term care residents living in nursing homes and residential care facilities depend on Medicaid to cover their care. When Medicaid rates are not adequate and are not regularly adjusted to keep pace with rising costs due to inflation, workers' pay also does not increase. This bill seeks to do many things, but most critical is providing funding in the MaineCare provider rate to ensure that workers are paid a better wage. Higher wages lead to improved recruitment and retention. Higher wages make health care jobs more competitive with other industries that require similar education or skill levels. Individuals who might otherwise choose retail, hospitality, or administrative work are more likely to pursue health care roles when the pay gap narrows.

When wages rise, staff turnover also drops, which stabilizes staffing and reduces the constant need to hire replacement staff or turn to expensive temporary agency staffing. Furthermore, retention is especially important in health care because experience improves patient outcomes and reduces training costs. Without competitive wages, long term care homes will continue to struggle to attract the caregivers we need. We urge the committee to vote ought to pass on LD 1932.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.