

Good afternoon members of the Committee.

My name is Heather Bailey and I am here today to speak in support of LD 1932, *An Act to Support Essential Support Workers and Enhance Workforce Development*. Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience.

I began working as a Personal Support Specialist just a few months after my mother passed away. I was searching for work that truly mattered—something meaningful—especially at a time when my children were all in school and I was trying to rebuild my sense of purpose. I found that purpose in in-home care.

At first, one of the greatest challenges was learning how to adapt to every new home and every unique situation I entered. No two clients were ever the same. Over time, I worked with some individuals for five or six years, and I grew to genuinely love and care for them. When they passed away, saying goodbye was heartbreaking. While it was difficult to witness pain, decline, and loneliness, being there for people during those moments gave me a deep sense of fulfillment and purpose that I will carry with me forever.

Some days, I would see four clients in a single day. This is not a job you simply leave behind when your shift ends. The responsibility and care stay with you. I often found myself thinking about my clients in the evenings—wondering if they were comfortable, if they were safe, or if they felt less alone because someone showed up for them that day. In-home care is more than a job; it is a commitment to being present for people when they need it most.

Personal Support Specialists play a critical role in helping individuals remain safely in their homes and out of nursing homes. They provide essential services ranging from simple companionship to complex support for individuals living with dementia and Alzheimer's disease. Many of the people we serve have no family or informal support systems. Without PSS services, they would be left without care—often with no alternative but institutional placement.

PSS staff frequently travel long distances—sometimes 30 to 45 minutes one way—to reach clients in rural communities. They assist individuals who cannot get out of bed, who need daily personal care, or who rely on them for transportation to medical appointments and grocery stores. Their work directly supports safety, dignity, and quality of life for some of Maine's most vulnerable residents.

Despite the essential nature of this work, PSS staff face serious challenges. Low wages make it difficult to afford basic necessities such as rent, fuel, groceries, and childcare. Staffing shortages limit our ability to provide flexible and responsive care, particularly for clients with complex or time-sensitive needs.

Many PSS workers enter the field in entry-level positions, often right out of high school, and require ongoing training and supervision. Limited access to reliable transportation, combined with extensive travel across large geographic areas, places significant financial strain on workers through fuel costs and vehicle wear and tear. PSS staff also navigate challenging home environments, including exposure to smoke, pets, and clients with mental or behavioral health needs—often without adequate compensation and alone in the field.

LD 1932 recognizes that investing in Personal Support Specialists is an investment in community stability, workforce sustainability, and the ability for Maine people to age safely at home. Increased support for wages, training, and staffing capacity is essential if we want to retain dedicated workers and ensure continued access to this vital care.

PSS workers do this job because they care—but caring alone cannot pay the bills or sustain a workforce. This legislation is a critical step toward honoring the value of essential support workers and ensuring they can continue showing up for Maine’s most vulnerable citizens. I urge you to support LD 1932. Thank you for your time, your consideration, and your commitment to the people of Maine.