

## **Personal Testimony on LD 1932, An Act to Support Essential Support Workers and Enhance Workforce Development.**

My name is Edward Laboke, a Direct Support Professional (DSP), who works for Woodfords Family Services residential Program.

- My role as a caregiver is to provide the adults with disability safety and the opportunities to integrate into their smaller and wider communities so that they live a fulfilling adult life. To deliver high quality services to these adults comes with extensive required trainings covering state and federal laws and protocols on behavioral, legal and medical fields. The trainings along with their implementations (caregiving), as well as low wages are stressful that only DSPs who have developed the love of humanity for people who deserve another chance to live fulfilling lives in their communities may persevere.
- I am a teacher by profession, and my experience of serving some students with disability at the schools called me in 2014 to Woodfords Family Services to try it out with adults with similar conditions in the residential/group home setting. I have served these adults now for close to 12 years and have developed a stronger rapport with them. This relationship with the people, who appreciate me even in the face of some challenges highlighted in bullet 1, is the reason I continue to value and deliver my services to them than the compensation benefits I receive from the services.
- Low wages has already been foregrounded above as one of the challenges, it indeed takes heart to stay in a challenging yet low compensated job. In 2020 Covid 19 Pandemic, I was one of the first DSPs to encounter a covid 19 infected consumer before the individual was confirmed covid positive. Five days later, although I was not, my wife and three of my four children were all confirmed covid positive. Consequently, the degree of emotional distress my family and I went through just because I was an essential yet low compensated worker and their covid 19 infections was immense! I believe livable compensation could have not prevented the infections as long as I was an essential worker, but reasonable wages could have emotionally strengthened my coping skills and financially allowed me to afford better nutrition and secure some personal protective equipment for my family.
- There exists data and experiential observation that encouraged me to write this testimony in support of LD 1932. As DSPs with the Woodfords Family Services, we are encouraged to refer our friends and acquaintances to join the DSP workforce but most of my acquaintances usually ask about the hourly wages. However, my honesty to them about the rates is often times enough to dissuade them from applying. Other data indicate that:
  - a) One in five of the DSP workforce are on SNAP and that revamps the cost rather than revenue for the state.
  - b) Up to 23,500 hours per week in the home homecare, services went unserved in 2024 and that put devastating effects on the people supported and their families.
  - c) An estimate 8,000 Maine employees deserted their employment so they could care for their loved ones.
  - d) The desertion by 8,000 Mainers from the labor force puts the State of Maine through an estimated \$1 billion revenue forfeiture each year.
- Finally, my testimony is in support of LD 1932 because it aims at addressing most if not all of the data presented above and many more undocumented data may exist out there. Once LD 1932 becomes the state law, it will translate into multiple ripple effects. Chief among these would be:
  - i. Statewide employee retention

- ii. Uptick in DSP employment and retention
- iii. State revenue upsurge
- iv. Reduction in unserved homecare hours

I therefore, ask this committee to vote for and pass this bill for the benefit of our state and its people.

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See attached above