

Testimony of Brynne O’Neal
Regulatory Policy Specialist, Maine State Nurses Association / National Nurses United

In Support of LD 2131, “An Act to Preserve and Improve Access to Nursing Facility Services in the State”

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Hearing: February 11, 2026, 10:00 a.m.

Dear Chair Ingwersen, Chair Meyer, and distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

On behalf of more than 4,000 registered nurses and health care professionals providing direct patient care in our state, the Maine State Nurses Association/National Nurses United (MSNA) writes in support of LD 2131.

Safe staffing levels are essential to safe patient care. Chronic understaffing is the primary driver of registered nurses leaving direct patient care.¹ When nurses are assigned unsafe patient loads, they are placed in an untenable position where they cannot provide the level of care their professional standards and ethical obligations require. This crisis not only jeopardizes patient safety but also pushes experienced nurses out of the nursing home workforce altogether, contributing to the more than one million registered nurses with active licenses nationwide who are not working as RNs.² The same dynamic impacts other direct care workers.

Decades of evidence demonstrate that inadequate nurse staffing in nursing facilities leads to preventable harm, including medication errors, untreated infections, pressure injuries, avoidable hospitalizations, and premature death.³ Keeping nursing facilities open and safe also requires other types of direct care staff. Research by the Maine Center for Economic Policy concluded that low wages for direct care workers are a primary driver of the workforce crisis, as well as economic hardship for direct care workers, and that MaineCare reimbursement rates for labor need to be increased to recruit and retain direct care workers.⁴

¹ National Nurses United. (2021). Protecting Our Front Line: Ending the Shortage of Good Nursing Jobs and the Industry-created Unsafe Staffing Crisis. https://www.nationalnursesunited.org/sites/default/files/nnu/documents/1121_StaffingCrisis_ProtectingOurFrontLine_Report_FINAL.pdf.

² National Nurses United. (2025, September 23). RE: NO nurse shortage: nurses urge accurate reporting of the staffing crisis. https://www.nationalnursesunited.org/sites/default/files/nnu/documents/0125_Reporter_Memo-Hospital_Staffing_Crisis_FINAL.pdf

³ Jutkowitz E., Landsteiner A., Ratner E., et al. (2022, March). Effects of nurse staffing on processes of care and resident outcomes in nursing homes: a systematic review. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK588095/>

⁴ Philips, A. (June 17, 2024). Maine Center for Economic Policy. <https://www.meccep.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Maines-Direct-Care-Shortage-and-Solutions-to-Fix-It.pdf>.

MSNA appreciates the legislature stepping up to fund nursing facilities as the federal government has cut funding for Medicaid. Nurses support adjusting MaineCare rates to ensure that direct care workers receive a living wage.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Brynne O'Neal".

Brynne O'Neal
Regulatory Policy Specialist
Maine State Nurses Association / National Nurses United