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Testimony of Louis G. Dugal

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

in SUPPORT of

LD 2131, Amended Title: Resolve, Directing DHHS to Amend Specific Portions of the Nursing Facility Principals of Reimbursement and the Timely Release Quality Payments

February 11, 2026 at 10:00 AM

Good morning, members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Louis Dugal and I'm the President of High View Rehabilitation and Nursing Center in Madawaska. High View has been a family-owned nursing facility for 47 years, of which I have been President for the majority.

High View is located in the most Northeastern Maine town of Madawaska. We are licensed for 51 residents, but due to low staffing, we have had to limit occupancy to under 40 residents which creates a disservice for the people of Aroostook County.

Staffing and occupancy have been an issue since Covid-19. Even though we prefer to hire local staff, we have been forced to contract with staffing agencies, hiring travel nurses, to be able to meet minimum staffing levels. Prior to Covid-19 we experienced staffing challenges, but nothing like the difficulties we've been experiencing since the pandemic when many of our staff left healthcare employment altogether. Between the pandemic and the low reimbursement rate which makes it difficult for direct care staff to make an honest living, many staff decided this field of work just wasn't worth it.

Because of my geographic location in northern Maine, I am limited in recruiting potential hires. It's no secret the overall population in Aroostook County is shrinking, and our population is getting older, creating a double whammy of limited workers and high demand.

My staff, like all other nursing facility staff, work very hard and are very devoted to the residents they care for. The job is 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, and 365 days per year. Nursing facility staff come to work to care for the residents, blizzards or not. There's no snow day for us.

Section 1 of the bill cleans up language in Section 67 of the Principles of Reimbursement for Nursing Facilities. These are important changes as they'll ensure COLA and reinstate the \$6.00 per day add-on that will help centers like mine pay more competitive wages for employees and hopefully help retain staff longer.

Section 2 of this bill requires the Department to release the funds nursing facilities earned by meeting Departmental requirements. We upheld our end of the bargain as part of rate reform, and yet, we're still waiting for the Department to hold up their end of the bargain and release the quality bonus payments.

Thank you for your time and I urge you to vote YES on LD 2131.

Louis Dugal