



LeadingAge Maine & New Hampshire is an association representing mission-driven senior living and long-term care providers in Maine and New Hampshire. Our member organizations include nursing homes, assisted living programs, federally-assisted and market-rate housing, and Life Plan Communities (continuing care retirement communities).

***Our Mission:** Inspiring our members to pursue innovation and the best life for older adults.*

***Our Vision:** LeadingAge Maine & New Hampshire is a recognized, transformational leader in shaping society's vision of aging.*

**Testimony of Denise M Vachon, Government Affairs, LeadingAge Maine and New Hampshire
Submitted to
The Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee and The Health and Human Services Committee
with regard to
LD 2212 An Act Making Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and
Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law
Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the FYs ending June 30, 2026 and June 30,
2027**

February 17, 2026

Senators Rotundo and Ingwersen, Representatives Gattine and Meyer, and Members of the Appropriations and Financial Services and Health and Human Services Committees

My name is Denise Vachon, I live in Farmingdale, and I speak today on behalf of MaineCare-participating nursing care and assisted living members of **LeadingAge Maine & New Hampshire**. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony **neither for nor against LD 2122**.

We recognize that this budget cycle is extremely weighty, and its very crafting is being made within challenging fiscal constraints and in response to significant changes in federal funding. We appreciate your thought leadership regarding the cost and commitments of the MaineCare system from various perspectives, and recognize your dedication to serving the citizens of Maine. Finally, we recognize that this budget is carefully considered in the context many other first priorities.

With that, on behalf of its providers, the care teams, and especially the residents and their families that we serve, let me begin, on behalf of LeadingAge ME NH and its members, by thanking you for your tireless work.

TESTIMONY

As we contemplate the Supplemental budget, we are grateful for DHHS' commitment to continued funding for direct care workers at 125% of minimum wage. We believe that that consideration is "baked into" this budget.

In support of your work, I offer the observation that there are **several important bills** having been heard but not yet worked by the HHS Committee that could have budgetary impacts to the long-term care and aging services sector. We will appreciate your "holding room" for funding that might result from these bills.

- **LD 1932 An Act to Support Essential Support Workers and Enhance Workforce Development** attempts to rectify the shortfall in COLAs as a result of the last Supplemental Budget. We continue to be deeply grateful for the efforts for remedy by the HHS Committee in the first session. However, that shortfall, coupled with the apparent lack of funding for a COLA in this Supplemental is concerning. **We urge your consideration of and commitment to fully funding of COLAs in the Supplemental Budget as well as to include consideration for innovations, technology and data collection.**
- **LD 2177 An Act to Update and Improve the MaineCare Reimbursement System**

is intended to modify the MaineCare rate-setting system. A key concern is the **signal of unreliability of reimbursement** for providers, as represented by language that makes funding “subject to [appropriations]”. The suggestion that the prioritization of funding may diminish for the services and supports that the citizens of Maine rely on to be there when they need them is most worrisome. It suggests an erosion of the mutual commitments made between the State and the Providers, where the State commits to reimbursement of reasonable approved costs, in exchange for the Providers’ commitment to make MaineCare supported services and supports available, with excellence in person-centered practices.

- **LD 2131 An Act to Preserve and Improve Access to Nursing Facility Services in the State** is specific to Nursing Care providers, and calls for the payments and adjustments related to rate reform – already approved – to be released: specifically the release of quality bonus payments, promised in December, 2025; relief to certain providers caught unintentionally by the “calculation of guardrails”, and the partial reinstatements of direct care add-on payments.

We ask that note be made that the resolution of these bills may come with fiscal notes and related consideration in the budget.

Having led a provider community for nearly my entire career, I cannot over-state my view that the MaineCare system is a delicate nexus of services and supports where the sustainability of one service line or sector relies on the sustainability of all others. And, the success and sustainability of each service line and sector relies on a qualified, well-trained, committed staff members who are fairly and competitively compensated to assure consistent qualified and heartfelt care for those we serve – the citizens of Maine.

Speaking for the sector I represent:

When funding for Nursing Facilities and Assisted Living Facilities is reliable, providers are more stable, can invest in their staff and residents, and the citizens of our state worry less about closures, and access to care in their home communities. Families can remain in the workforce without worry about their loved one’s care and safety, rather than give up their livelihood to care for their person. The State economy is well-served. The need for public supports for those who could otherwise be gainfully employed is lessened.

When the long-term care sector is properly funded and functioning, it eases the burden on hospitals, relieving the strain of inappropriately placed individuals there, so that others with acute needs have access. In turn, that same funding serves to keep MaineCare resources fully activated (beds remain open, staffing is addressed). In turn again, fully activated resources provide access to those on wait lists. And, since those on wait lists can be more readily served, the burden on and wait lists for home based services can be relieved. #Winning

Each program within the MaineCare system is equally essential to the State’s ability to meet the needs of its citizens. It takes the entire spectrum of services and supports to create a system where everyone can access the services and supports they need with the lowest barriers, and where their needs can best be met.

We ask that, in your good work to craft a responsible budget in the coming weeks, you keep in mind that, for the sake of a strong direct care workforce, we must prioritize competitive compensation and benefits (think: COLAs), but also consider the budget implications for access to housing that is affordable, transportation that is readily available, child care that is safe and accessible, and care for older adults that is responsive -- all are essential to sustaining a strong workforce. These people are the very foundation within the continuum of health care, long term care, home care, personal care, programs for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, programs for people living with physical disabilities and brain injuries, and all the programs that create wellness and safety for those we all serve. They deserve to be prioritized and valued in this budget, as they are in our programs.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service to our State and its citizens.

LeadingAge ME NH and its members stand ready to support your work, at your request.
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