

Debbie Dionne
Topsham
LD 1932

Testimony in Support of LD 1932

An Act to Strengthen Essential Support Worker Wages and Stabilize Long-Term Care Services

Senator Igwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Debbie Dionne, and I am the mother of Kate, who has lived in a group home for the past 23 years. The quality of her life depends entirely on the Direct Support Professionals who assist her with every aspect of daily living — from personal care and meals to community inclusion and emotional support. Consistency and trust are not luxuries in disability services; they are the foundation of safety, dignity, and well-being.

Over the years, I have watched extraordinary caregivers leave this profession — not because they lack commitment, but because they cannot afford to stay. More than 100 group homes have closed due to insufficient staffing and inadequate reimbursement rates. Behind every closure is a person like my daughter whose stability, relationships, and home are put at risk.

LD 1932 is a necessary and responsible step forward. I applaud the sponsors and co-sponsors of this bill for their acknowledgement of need for this bill and their support: Speaker FECTEAU, President DAUGHTRY and Representatives: CLOUTIER, GATTINE, POIRIER, STOVER, Senators: BENNETT, DUSON.

By increasing the labor reimbursement rate from 125% to 140% of minimum wage, this bill recognizes that caregiving is skilled, essential work. It ensures that workers paid through MaineCare or state-funded programs are compensated at no less than 125% of minimum wage — establishing a floor that reflects the value of this profession.

This bill also does something critically important: it measures the care gap. We cannot fix what we do not track. Requiring the Maine Health Data Organization to establish a baseline report on approved but unstaffed hours will finally provide transparency about the real impact of workforce shortages on people with disabilities and older adults.

The biennial cost reporting requirement will help the Legislature understand the true cost of long-term care — not just today, but into the future. Planning responsibly is far wiser than reacting to crisis after crisis.

The inclusion of additional voices on the Essential Support Workforce Advisory Committee strengthens collaboration. And the Innovations in Care and Support Technology Plan, along with the expansion of worker portability and standardized training, reflects thoughtful forward planning to modernize and stabilize this workforce.

For 23 years, my daughter has relied on caregivers who show up every day with compassion and skill. They administer medications, manage behavioral supports, respond to medical needs, and ensure she is part of her community. They are not “minimum wage” workers. They are professionals entrusted with human lives.

Caregiving is an essential profession. It deserves to be compensated and acknowledged as such.

LD 1932 will not solve every workforce challenge, but it is a meaningful, structural step toward stability. For families like mine, stability is everything.

I urge you to support LD 1932.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,
Debbie Dionne