



## **Testimony of Catherine Thibedeau on LD 2228- An Act to Eliminate Inactive Boards and Commissions**

### **Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government**

**March 18, 2026**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Sailsbury, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on LD 2228.

My name is Catherine Thibedeau, Executive Director Emerita at 3Rivers, Inc., a statewide nonprofit supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and autism. Formed last summer through the merger of three organizations (Uplift, Group Main Stream, and Independence Advocates of Maine), 3Rivers, Inc. now operates in every county in Maine, serving over 500 people and employing more than 350 staff, along with 150 shared living providers. Additionally, I serve as the Vice Chair of the Essential Support Workforce Advisory Committee, which advises DHHS and the legislature on direct care workforce issues, and I am on the board of the Maine Association of Community Service Providers (representing Penquis-Downeast).

I am submitting this testimony to request a correction of what appears to be a material error in LD 2228, which proposes eliminating the Essential Support Workforce Advisory Committee and labeling it as inactive or expired. However, the Committee is neither inactive nor expired. Per statute, the Committee's term does not end until January 1, 2028. The Essential Support Workforce Advisory Committee (ESWAC) is active and is fulfilling its statutory duties by advising the Legislature, Governor, and state agencies on Maine's shortage of essential support workers. Our responsibilities include examining staffing needs and workforce trends across the state and in MaineCare-funded services, monitoring workforce shortages and system capacity, collaborating with key partners such as the Department of Labor and the Department of Health and Human Services, and making policy recommendations on recruitment, retention, training, and workforce expansion.

Our committee's work remains essential. For those less familiar with the essential support workforce, it comprises individuals who provide direct support and care to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, behavioral health needs, and older adults. This workforce enables thousands of Maine residents to live, work, and age in their communities, yet faces persistent and severe challenges. Chronic staffing shortages, high turnover, competition for wages with other sectors, and increasing service demand due to demographic and healthcare system pressures all contribute to the crisis.

ESWAC exists to advise the Legislature and Administration on strategies to address these challenges; disbanding this advisory structure while these issues remain urgent would significantly weaken the State's ability to respond effectively and in a coordinated manner.

My understanding is that the inclusion of ESWAC in LD 2228 may have been in error; therefore, I respectfully request that the **Essential Support Workforce Advisory Committee be removed from LD 2228.**

Thank you for your attention to this issue and for the opportunity to provide clarification. I would be happy to answer questions or provide additional information that may be helpful.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C. Thibedeau', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Catherine Thibedeau  
Executive Director Emerita  
3Rivers

Catherine Thibedeau  
Orono  
LD 2228

Senator Baldacci, Representative Sailsbury, and Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on LD 2228.

My name is Catherine Thibedeau, Executive Director Emerita at 3Rivers, Inc., a statewide nonprofit supporting individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and autism. Formed last summer through the merger of three organizations (Uplift, Group Main Stream, and Independence Advocates of Maine), 3Rivers, Inc. now operates in every county in Maine, serving over 500 people and employing more than 350 staff, along with 150 shared living providers. Additionally, I serve as the Vice Chair of the Essential Support Workforce Advisory Committee, which advises DHHS and the legislature on direct care workforce issues, and I am on the board of the Maine Association of Community Service Providers (representing Penquis Downeast).

I am submitting this testimony to request a correction of what appears to be a material error in LD 2228, which proposes eliminating the Essential Support Workforce Advisory Committee and labeling it as inactive or expired. However, the Committee is neither inactive nor expired. Per statute, the Committee's term does not end until January 1, 2028. The Essential Support Workforce Advisory Committee (ESWAC) is active and is fulfilling its statutory duties by advising the Legislature, Governor, and state agencies on Maine's shortage of essential support workers. Our responsibilities include examining staffing needs and workforce trends across the state and in MaineCare-funded services, monitoring workforce shortages and system capacity, collaborating with key partners such as the Department of Labor and the Department of Health and Human Services, and making policy recommendations on recruitment, retention, training, and workforce expansion.

Our committee's work remains essential. For those less familiar with the essential support workforce, it comprises individuals who provide direct support and care to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, behavioral health needs, and older adults. This workforce enables thousands of Maine residents to live, work, and age in their communities, yet faces persistent and severe challenges. Chronic staffing shortages, high turnover, competition for wages with other sectors, and increasing service demand due to demographic and healthcare system pressures all contribute to the crisis.

ESWAC exists to advise the Legislature and Administration on strategies to address these challenges; disbanding this advisory structure while these issues remain urgent would significantly weaken the State's ability to respond effectively and in a coordinated manner.

My understanding is that the inclusion of ESWAC in LD 2228 may have been in error; therefore, I respectfully request that the Essential Support Workforce Advisory Committee be removed from LD 2228.

Thank you for your attention to this issue and for the opportunity to provide clarification. I would be happy to answer questions or provide additional information that may be helpful.