

ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION®

Testimony

Relating to

L.D. 209, An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2025.

Jill Carney
Director of Public Policy
Alzheimer's Association, Maine Chapter

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Services

January 23, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Gattine, Representative Meyer, members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Jill Carney, Director of Public Policy for the Alzheimer's Association, Maine Chapter, and a resident of Cumberland. As a member of Maine's Essential Care & Support Workforce Partnership – a voluntary partnership committed to solving Maine's long standing shortage in this critical workforce – we are deeply concerned about the Department of Health and Human Services' December 2, 2024 announcement that it would not implement cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs) for the MaineCare program required by 22 M.R.S.A §3173-J and §7402. This action violates state law, exacerbates a worsening care crisis, and will have a negative impact on our state's economy. We urge the Committees to provide funding to ensure employers can be reimbursed for the wage increases the workforce was promised.

Alzheimer's is a public health crisis in Maine and across the nation. In Maine, there are 29,600 people over the age of 65 living with Alzheimer's, with more under the age of 65 or who have other forms of dementia. As the population ages and people live longer, the prevalence of Alzheimer's will continue to grow in the decades beyond, expected to double by 2060. Alzheimer's is one of the costliest diseases to society; currently, \$360 billion is spent on care for people living with dementia nationwide, increasing to nearly \$1 trillion by 2050. State action to help families better manage dementia is critical to improved health and social outcomes, both for patient and caregiver, and reining in costs.

The largest segment of the workforce that supports people living with dementia is the direct care workforce. Direct care workers — who are formally classified as personal care aides, home health aides, and nursing assistants but known by a wide range of job titles in the field — assist older adults and people with disabilities in private homes, community-based settings such as adult day services and residential care, skilled nursing homes, and other settings such as

ALZHEIMER'S ASSOCIATION®

hospitals. Across these settings, direct care workers deliver the majority of day-to-day care to patients, clients, or residents living with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.

Those with Alzheimer's are high users of long-term care services. At the age of 80, 75 percent of people with Alzheimer's live in a nursing home, compared with just four percent of the general population. Nearly half of nursing home residents have Alzheimer's or other dementia, as does more than one in three users of home health agency services.

Nationwide, the crisis of a shortage in the direct care workforce significantly impacts people living with Alzheimer's and their families. The Alzheimer's Association finds that an estimated 1.2 million additional direct care workers will be needed between 2020 and 2030 – more new workers than in any other single occupation in the United States.

Although more direct care workers will be needed in the years ahead, the long-term care field is already struggling to fill existing direct care positions. Turnover rates are high in this workforce — estimated at 64 percent annually for direct care workers providing home care and 99 percent for nursing assistants in nursing homes — and recruitment and retention are long-standing challenges. In turn, instability in the workforce and understaffing across care settings can lead to stress, injury and burnout among direct care workers while also compromising care access and quality.

Governor Mills and the Maine Legislature have recognized the need to recruit and retain workers in this profession and have implemented reforms and other initiatives to this end. Nevertheless, continued attention on this crisis is of particular importance to the community of people living with Alzheimer's or other dementia. Again, we strongly urge the Committees to provide the funding necessary to provide the requisite wage increases for our essential care and support workforce.