

Tabatha Nute-In Opposition of LD 979 4/1/25

Good Afternoon. My name is Tabatha Nute, and I'm the Administrator at Market Square Health Care Center in South Paris. We have 116 bed between our three levels of care: 76 beds of skilled/long-term, a Level 4 PNMI residential care unit with 24 beds, and a 16-bed Level II assisted living memory care unit.

I'm here today with an urgent plea to oppose the passage of LD979 in its current form. The changes in this unfunded repeal and replacement mandate will have immediate and devastating consequences for one of Maine's most vulnerable populations.

Many of my peers will tell you that Part B alone of this mandate will cost the industry an additional \$30-40 million annually and require us to hire 600 more full-time employees collectively. We'll tell you that we'd have already hired them if we could. The historic workforce shortage is a critical issue that this bill does not address, and it will only exacerbate the situation. We'll discuss how this mandate is likely to benefit contract labor agencies, whose price gouging has undoubtedly contributed to the over \$24 million annual financial shortfall for Residential Care facilities. This will lead to further closures of facilities in a state already struggling with long waitlists and reduced access. These things are true, but I didn't come here today to tell you that.

Instead, I came to tell you about people we serve. Our Memory Care residents have come to us from hotel rooms-because they couldn't be kept safe at home; from grieving daughters who didn't know what to do for mom when their dad died suddenly; and from isolated living

situations where people faced dementia alone. Their families all tell us they can sleep comfortable at night-in their own homes, knowing their loved ones are safe and well cared for. Our Memory Care unit is calm in a world that can feel like chaos to people whose disease process is confusing and scary. At our organization, people discover a new sense of community. They need solace and compassion, and we give that to them. We're small enough to focus on individual care, but large enough for people to find a new best friend every day. If these changes are implemented, our memory care unit would be one of the eight that would need to be converted to a res care unit. It's unlikely we'll survive that. Beyond the necessary physical changes, it'd also be disruptive and dangerous to the environment where people thrive. Since opening in 2018, we've had one deficiency-related to paperwork, not quality. Although I believe we're exceptional, I don't think we're an exception. This room is filled with hardworking Mainers who want to do the right thing for our aging population. I don't believe we would be here today without being deeply invested in this industry. Instead of passing this mandate, I'd like to ask for DHHS to bring providers and the Maine Healthcare Association to the table and find a collaborative approach to quality improvement. Together, we could build a better path forward. I'd personally love to contribute. I have a lot to offer, including ideas, willingness, dedication, and passion for this work. The thing I don't have is the heart to tell these families that they must find a new place for their loved ones to live because these changes forced our Memory Care to close. I'm here to ask you to prevent that from happening.

Thanks for your time and consideration.