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Testimony of Rep. Rafael Macias introducing

LD 1613, An Act to Establish Maine's Care Force to Address the State's Health Care Crisis *Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services*

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Rafael Macias, and I represent House District 51, which includes part of Topsham. Thank you for the opportunity to introduce **LD 1613, An Act to Establish Maine's Care Force to Address the State's Health Care Crisis**.

I was in the Indian Ocean when the tsunami hit Banda Aceh and I was in Japan when the tsunami struck Fukushima.

In both cases, I watched America rise to the moment. We didn't hesitate. We sent aircraft carriers full of sailors—bringing medical care, food, clean water, and comfort. We put our people in harm's way, even into the path of a radiation plume from a nuclear plant—because we knew what it meant to run toward a crisis.

I was so proud of that response. Proud of who we were when it counted.

But back home in America—and right here in Maine—we are in the middle of our own disaster, playing out in slow motion.

We're in a healthcare crisis,
A childcare crisis,
A caregiver burnout crisis,
A housing crisis,
And a workforce shortage affecting every community in this state.

People are suffering quietly—parents, elders, people with disabilities—struggling to get the care they need, while caregivers are overworked, underpaid, and leaving the field entirely.

The question is: What are we going to do about it?

Maine's Care Force is our answer. It's how we run toward this crisis. It's what we can do now.

Here's what it does:

We recruit, train, certify, and employ caregivers across Maine. These are not volunteers. They're professionals. They'll be paid according to their qualifications, with a living wage and benefits that reflect the value of the care they provide.

Maine is going to care for its caregivers.

In return for a three-year commitment, each Care Force member is trained in:

- Childcare
- Elder care
- And care for adults with disabilities

Their training includes:

- First aid and prescription management
- Financial literacy
- Food preparation
- English as a Second Language
- Mindfulness and emotional support
- And even gameplay and creative engagement—tools that foster connection and healing.

Once trained, caregivers are strategically deployed to the areas that need care the most. Rural towns with no elder care. Cities with childcare deserts. Families stuck on waitlists. We don't let the burden fall on those with the least—we send help where help is needed.

This bill isn't just a moral response—it's a workforce strategy.

We solve three problems at once:

1. We fill the caregiving gap.
2. We offer meaningful, stable employment to Mainers who want to work.
3. And we restore dignity and value to a profession that has been treated like an afterthought for far too long.

Some will ask about the cost. But I ask: What's the cost of doing nothing?

We're already paying it—in lost productivity, in ER visits for non-emergencies, in caregiver burnout, in parents forced to leave jobs, in lonely elders slipping through the cracks.

Maine's Care Force is not a handout. It's an investment—in our people, our communities, and the care economy that holds everything else up.

Maine can lead the nation in this. We can be the state that took caregiving seriously—and made it a cornerstone of our future.

Besides, we are the government. We can act with the same urgency, the same courage, and the same compassion we show overseas—here at home.

We don't need to wait for the next tsunami, earthquake, or hurricane to respond. Let's run toward the crisis and deploy Maine's Care Force now.

Thank you. I welcome your questions.