Testimony of Ben Hawkins, Director of Public Affairs
Maine Health Care Association

Testimony before the Committee on Health and Human Services in support of

LD 1720, An Act Regarding Benefits and Training for Long-term Care Workers

Public Hearing: Friday, May 2, 2025

Senator Ingwersen and Representative Meyer as well as Distinguished Members of the Committee of Health and Human Services:

My name is Ben Hawkins, and I serve as the Director of Public Affairs of the Maine Health Care Association. We represent approximately 200 nursing homes, assisted living centers, and residential care facilities across the state. Our mission is to empower members to ensure the integrity, quality, and sustainability of long term care in Maine.

I am testifying in strong support of LD 1720, An Act Regarding Benefits and Training for Long-term Care Workers.

Legislators often ask, "How can we help fix the care shortage, especially without allocating more of our state budget to this problem?" While funding is paramount, this bill offers a lower-cost answer that would help. At a comparatively minimal additional cost to the state and providers, this bill makes long term care a more attractive employer, broadens the workforce pipeline, and works to ensure more people are able to be trained in long term care fields. LD 1720 achieves this by doing three important things:

First, LD 1720 establishes direct MaineCare reimbursement for staff training programs, including CNA certification, other care training, and English as a Second Language (ESL) education. These costs are real and recurring barriers to workforce development. Providers are often eager to expand training efforts but cannot do so sustainably without financial support. Direct reimbursement—rather than

one-time grants or unfunded expectations—will allow facilities to build capacity and bring more Mainers into care careers.

Second, the bill requires that the Certified Nursing Assistant written exam be offered in additional languages, including French, Spanish, Chinese, and Filipino. This is a long overdue change that other states, including Massachusetts, have already made. It also acknowledges Maine's shifting demographics and the critical role that immigrants and New Mainers already play in our healthcare system. For too long, language barriers, not clinical ability, have blocked otherwise qualified individuals from entering the field. LD 1720 removes this unnecessary bottleneck. And to be clear, this bill does not remove the English competency requirement that all CNA students must demonstrate. It only helps people take the final written exam in the language in which they think best. It might seem like a small change, but it is a huge sign of Maine's willingness to welcome others, especially during the stressful examination process when these details matter.

Third, the bill updates MaineCare reimbursement principles to cover interpreter services for long term care workers and residents. Communication breakdowns threaten quality of care and safety, and they burden facilities that are already stretched thin. By reimbursing interpreter costs, the state would support inclusion and accessibility while ensuring better outcomes for everyone.

In closing, LD 1720 recognizes that rebuilding the long term care workforce is not about slogans or mandates. It requires investing in the people who do the work, removing systemic barriers to entry, and giving providers the tools to succeed. This bill is a pragmatic, and values-driven response to one of our state's most pressing challenges.

I respectfully urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass, and I thank you for your time and consideration.