



Rachel Talbot Ross
Senator, District 28

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

3 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Testimony of Senator Rachel Talbot Ross introducing
LD 1720, "An Act Regarding Benefits and Training for Long-term Care Workers"
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
May 2, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Rachel Talbot Ross. I proudly represent Senate District 28, which includes part of my hometown of Portland and Peaks Island. Thank you for the opportunity to present LD 1720, "An Act Regarding Benefits and Training for Long-term Care Workers."

In Portland and across Maine, long-term care providers are facing a serious and seemingly intractable workforce crisis. Facilities are struggling to find and retain the staff they need for essential roles, including certified nursing assistants, housekeepers, and dietary aides. These individuals provide hands-on care, comfort, and dignity to our aging population. When facilities can't staff these positions, beds sit empty, waitlists grow longer, and families are left without options.

Before I continue, I want to note that I am offering an amendment to LD 1720 for the Committee's consideration. This amendment removes the sections related to participation in the Maine Public Employees Retirement System (MainePERS) and access to the state employee health plan.

I made this change after hearing from MainePERS, who raised valid concerns that extending membership to workers employed by private long-term care facilities could jeopardize the retirement system's compliance with federal tax law. While some long-term care workers — such as those employed by municipal facilities like the Barron Center in Portland — are already eligible to participate, most work for private employers. Under current federal guidance, including additional private sector employees could put the entire retirement system at risk.

Given that risk, I believe it is prudent to narrow the bill and focus supporting training and interpreter services that help strengthen and diversify our long-term care workforce. To their credit, many long-term care providers are not waiting for help. Across the state, we're seeing providers step up to launch in-house training programs, particularly for CNA certification. These employer-driven solutions are designed to grow the workforce directly from within their communities.

In Portland, for example, several providers are partnering with local immigrant-serving organizations to identify and train candidates eager to work in healthcare. However, these innovative programs are challenging to sustain and scale without meaningful support.

MaineCare does not consistently reimburse for the full cost of running these training programs. In many cases, it doesn't cover the cost at all. That means providers are expected to absorb the expense of instruction, materials, and occasionally wraparound services on already razor-thin margins. It's not a question of will. It's a question of resources.



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LD 1720 helps address this by allowing MaineCare reimbursement for CNA training and interpreter services. This would make a real difference, not just in Portland, but in rural and urban communities alike. If we want to expand access to training, bring more people into the workforce, and remove language barriers that keep willing individuals on the sidelines, then we must equip providers with the tools to do so.

This bill also expands CNA exam language options so that individuals can take the test in the language they know best. For many New Mainers in Portland and beyond, this change alone could be the bridge between potential and practice. Other states, like Massachusetts, already offer this. Maine should, too.

What I appreciate about LD 1720 is that it doesn't rely on large new appropriations. Instead, it focuses on smart, targeted changes, removing unnecessary hurdles, and giving long-term care providers a fighting chance to solve the crisis on the ground.

This is an opportunity for us as lawmakers to empower Maine's long-term care providers. It affirms that innovation at the facility level should be met with structural support at the state level. If we want more people to choose caregiving as a career, especially from underserved communities, we must make the path accessible, stable, and sustainable. That's what this bill helps us do.

I urge the Committee to support LD 1720. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Rachel Talbot Ross
State Senator, District 28
Representing part of Portland and Peaks Island