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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

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**TESTIMONY OF REPRESENTATIVE RYAN D. FECTEAU, SPEAKER OF THE MAINE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, REGARDING LD 1932, AN ACT TO SUPPORT ESSENTIAL
SUPPORT WORKERS AND ENHANCE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

Good afternoon Representative Meyer, Senator Ingwersen, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. I am House Speaker Ryan Fecteau, and I have the privilege of representing my hometown of Biddeford.

I am here today to present LD 1932, *An Act to Support Essential Support Workers and Enhance Workforce Development*.

It is no secret that Maine is the oldest state in the nation. We are facing a critical shortage of direct care workers needed to support our aging population and adults and children with disabilities. We have families desperate for help and agencies desperate for staff, yet we continue to lose essential workers due to the unlivable wages.

I know firsthand how critical direct care workers are to the state of Maine because my mother is a direct care worker. I know the intense physical and mental demands of these jobs, demands that are only exacerbated when coupled with the stress of low wages. These workers, who are some of the lowest paid in the state, not only work long hours, but also spend unpaid time serving clients and their families.

That is why I am here today. To introduce a bill which seeks to increase pay for these essential jobs, to make the most of the workforce we have, and to look for innovative ways to grow the talent pipeline for the future. A bill which I am proud to say has bipartisan support as it strives to strengthen a workforce which is important to the whole state of Maine.

Committee members should have in hand a copy of the amendment I am presenting today, and my testimony is based on that proposed amendment.

Our bill will raise the labor portion of the MaineCare reimbursement rate for employers of Essential Care & Support Workers to 140% of minimum wage and will require that the workers providing these services are paid no less than 125% of the minimum wage.

Increasing the reimbursement rate will also give employers more flexibility to increase wages for workers— they will be able to do things like give raises to their employees for longevity, and this in turn will help keep people in these important jobs.

This bill will also build upon the work being done pursuant to LD 977, which this committee passed last session, requiring the Maine Health Data Organization to study the care gap in Maine. The amendment before you will require that we use the findings and recommendations from the LD 977 report to make sure that we have a reliable and ongoing picture of unmet need for direct care services across Maine.

Passing this bill and investing in our direct care workers will not only help those currently in the industry but will encourage more people to consider these important careers. This will help close the existing care gap in our state and will increase access for everyone who needs these services. By prioritizing these rate increases for people filling these critical roles, Maine will join the ranks of several other states that have recognized this direct care crisis and taken action to strengthen the workforce.

Direct workers care for us and we must care for them.

I thank you for your consideration of this bill and am happy to take any questions you may have.