

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT LD 1932: An Act to Support Essential Support Workers and Enhance Workforce Development Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

January 20, 2026

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Stella Cain I am a Direct Support Professional and Certified Residential Medication Aide serving individuals with Intellectual and Developmental disabilities.

I am pleased to be here today in support of this legislation that would increase wages for Essential Support Workers.

I've worked in this field professionally for six years but honestly it's been lifelong for me growing up with an older brother I had to take care of. Longevity is rare in this workforce, it exists though because relationships, trust, and consistency are at the heart of this job.

Wage increases are important to me because this work is essential and because I've seen firsthand what happens when essential workers are asked to survive on wages that don't meet the cost of living in Maine. I've watched someone near and dear to me in this field work full time supporting others while being unhoused themselves all while caring for their children. I've watched them juggle bills, choosing which ones could wait, go without so their children were first and foremost, and rely on already strained food pantries just to make it through the week. This is someone doing deeply meaningful, skilled work and still not earning enough to provide stability for their own family.

That reality is not unique. It's common.

Like many workers across the state, I've worked additional jobs, picked up extra shifts, and supplemented my income just to survive. I've stayed in this field not because it's easy or financially secure, but because it's fulfilling and because the people we support deserve experienced, consistent care.

I do this work because I believe in the people I support. I believe in their right to live full lives in their communities with dignity and autonomy. I believe in being a steady presence someone they can trust not another staff member who disappears because the job is financially unsustainable.

This passion does not pay rent. Fulfillment does not cover groceries. And commitment does not protect me from burnout when I and many others are just one emergency away from crisis.

When wages remain low, workers leave not because they don't care, but because they can't afford to stay. And when that happens, the people who feel it first are the individuals receiving care. High turnover disrupts progress, safety, and trust. It destabilizes entire systems.

Wage increases are not just about workers they are about stability, quality of care, and respect for professions that hold communities together. They are about ensuring that people who care for others are not pushed into poverty themselves.

I want to continue doing this work. I want others to enter and stay in this field. But that requires wages that allow us to live with dignity, not just scrape by.

Thank you for listening, and for considering the real lives behind these numbers.