



## Testimony

Relating to

### **L.D. 1772, An Act to Support Essential Support Workers and Enhance Workforce Development**

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Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

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Senate Chair Ingwersen, House Chair Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Jill Carney, Director of Maine Public Policy for the Alzheimer's Association, and a resident of Cumberland. The Alzheimer's Association supports L.D. 1932, which would implement several reforms to strengthen the essential support workforce, including increased reimbursement and improving and standardizing basic training across the workforce. *As the Committee considers this legislation, however, we recommend that the Committee adopts changes to ensure a dementia-capable essential care workforce across all settings.*

First, L.D. 1932's sponsor has proposed updated language to add an organization with expertise in dementia to be added to the stakeholder group on credentialing and redesign, which we strongly support.

Second, the Alzheimer's Association proposes that the Committee could add additional language requiring that the plan required under the credentialing and training redesign section must include a strategy for ensuring that all workers receive dementia education. There are many efforts to increase the ability of essential care and support workers to recognize and respond to dementia-related behaviors, but those efforts primarily focus on the workforce in nursing home and residential care settings. To fully ensure that the entire workforce receives dementia education, no matter the setting in which they work, a statutory requirement for the plan would accomplish this, while still providing the

department with the flexibility to determine the amount and content of dementia-specific training.

### **Background on the Alzheimer's Community and the Essential Support Workforce**

The Alzheimer's Association, Maine Chapter is a member of Maine's Essential Care & Support Workforce Partnership – a voluntary partnership committed to solving Maine's long-standing shortage in this critical workforce. Families affected by Alzheimer's rely heavily on the essential support workforce, as it is the largest segment of the workforce that supports people living with dementia.

Essential support workers — who are formally classified as personal care aides, home health aides, and nursing assistants but known by a wide range of job titles in the field — assist older adults and people with disabilities in private homes, community-based settings such as adult day services and residential care, skilled nursing homes, and other settings such as hospitals. Across these settings, essential support workers deliver the majority of day-to-day care to patients, clients, or residents living with Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia.

Those with Alzheimer's are high users of long-term care services. At the age of 80, 75 percent of people with Alzheimer's live in a nursing home, compared with just four percent of the general population. Nearly half of nursing home residents have Alzheimer's or other dementia, as does more than one in three users of home health agency services.

As the population ages and people live longer, the prevalence of Alzheimer's will continue to grow in the decades beyond, expected to double by 2060. State action to help families better manage dementia is critical to improved health and social outcomes, both for patient and caregiver, and reining in costs. As the prevalence of Alzheimer's grows, so too will the demand for essential support workers. Ensuring a robust, skilled, dementia-capable workforce is therefore a critical component to addressing the public health crisis of Alzheimer's and related dementia.

Nationwide, the crisis of a shortage in the essential support workforce significantly impacts people living with Alzheimer's and their families. The Alzheimer's Association finds that an estimated 1.2 million additional essential support workers will be needed between 2020 and 2030 – more new workers than in any other single occupation in the United States.

Although more direct care workers will be needed in the years ahead, the long-term care field is already struggling to fill existing essential support positions. Turnover rates are high

in this workforce — estimated at 64 percent annually for direct care workers providing home care and 99 percent for nursing assistants in nursing homes — and recruitment and retention are long-standing challenges. In turn, instability in the workforce and understaffing across care settings can lead to stress, injury and burnout among direct care workers while also compromising care access and quality. Improving dementia training can help workers in this field to recognize and respond to dementia-related behaviors, which can be challenging to navigate. If not supported with education and strategies, stress and burnout that exacerbates existing problems with retention.

We appreciate that the Maine Legislature has, in recent years, recognized the need to recruit and retain workers in this profession and have implemented reforms and other initiatives to this end. Nevertheless, continued attention on this crisis is of particular importance to the community of people living with Alzheimer's or other dementia. Again, we support L.D. 1932, as well as additional language to guarantee inclusion of basic information about Alzheimer's and dementia in training that all essential workers would receive.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill and suggested amendment.

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