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AARP Maine Testimony in support of LD 1932 An Act to Support Essential Support Workers and Enhance Workforce Development

Greetings Chairs Ingwersen and Meyer and members of the Committee On Health and Human Services. My name is Bridget Quinn, I am an Associate State Director of Advocacy and Outreach with AARP Maine. AARP is fighting for older Americans to have high-quality, affordable options when it comes to long-term care—especially care at home. On behalf of our nearly 200,000 members statewide, thank you for the opportunity to share testimony today. Today, I am testifying in favor of LD 1932.

After a lifetime of hard work and contributing to our society, older Mainers deserve to live with independence, security, and dignity. To create secure environments, we need to ensure adequate numbers of staff that can provide facility care or home care. We are in dire need of essential care workers to care for our older friends and family as they need help with transportation, bathing, dressing, eating, and other tasks. The direct care workforce is an integral part of the nation's healthcare system; however, we have a severe shortage of this workforce due to long standing issues. The essential care workforce shortage is due to low compensation (including poor benefits), a lack of adequate training, poor job satisfaction, and increased need for workers. LD 1932 takes steps to address these problems.

LD 1932 will increase reimbursement rates and worker pay by ensuring that as minimum wage rises reimbursement remains at 140% of minimum wage. Further, LD 1932 establishes a wage floor at 125% of minimum wage. PHI reports that in 2022, 25% of Maine's direct care workers lived in low-income households and 24% were housing cost burden. In 2022, the median yearly income for a direct care worker in Maine was \$28,503. Further, PHI reported that in 2022 11% of direct care workers in Maine were uninsured and it is estimated 1 in 5 essential care workers are enrolled in SNAP. The provisions in this bill that will increase wage competitiveness is critical to retain workers, bring in new workers and begin to value the critical work of this workforce.

Regarding adequate training and job portability, LD 1932 takes the important step of looking at credentialing and job redesign. Research has found that direct care worker training improves staff satisfaction and retention across all long term services and support settings. In addition to the quality and availability of training, industry experts have noted

the promising practice of creating a uniform state certification standard for direct care workers regardless of the setting in which they work. Provisions in LD 1932 will allow the established stakeholder group to look into opportunities to make Maine's training and credentialing much more efficient and supportive to our essential care workers.

Regarding, Sec. 8. Innovations in Care and Support Technology Plan. We commend the design of the stakeholder group to include clients receiving essential support worker services. We want to highlight that decisions made around how technology can be used to fill care caps must prioritize the experience and desires of clients.

Reporting and research statutes in LD 1932 will also be critical to better understanding Maine's care gap and the challenges ahead. The legislature will be better prepared to address the needs of Mainers with the reporting provisions in LD 1932 that will help this committee and future legislators understand the cost of care with a biennial funding comparison report. The Maine Health Data Organization will also be empowered to better understand the gaps in care.

Overwhelming Mainers want to stay in their homes as they age. A robust, well trained and adequately compensated essential care force is needed to ensure that Mainers have choice an ability to age in place. When health issues arise, or daily activities like bathing and dressing, meal preparation, or transportation become a challenge, seniors need better options about how and where they receive care. LD 1932 will help Maine be prepared for the future and build a care system that supports Mainers in their communities, where they want to be. For these reasons we urge this committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1932.

Thank you for your time. If you have questions for me, I can be reached at bquinn@aarp.org or at 207-272-8563

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