

Nicole Grohoski
Senator, District 7



P.O. Box 1732
Ellsworth, ME 04605

THE MAINE SENATE
132nd Legislature

Testimony of Senator Nicole Grohoski introducing
LD 2131, An Act to Preserve and Improve Access to
Nursing Facility Services in the State
Before the Committee on Health and Human Services
February 11, 2026

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Nicole Grohoski, and I am honored to represent the 22 coastal and island communities of Senate District 7. Thank you for the opportunity to introduce my sponsor's amendment to LD 2131, now titled "Resolve, Directing the Department of Health and Human Services to Amend Specific Portions of the Nursing Facility Principles of Reimbursement and to Timely Release Quality Payments."

The reality is that for many of our neighbors, the nursing home crisis isn't just a headline – it is a heartbreaking personal experience. In my hometown of Ellsworth, our community felt this shift deeply when Seaport Village, the very last skilled nursing facility in Hancock County, was forced to change its mission and convert to residential care. Since 2014, 29 facilities across Maine have closed their doors, leaving anxious families and uprooted seniors in their wake. We have the oldest population in the country, and yet we have seen the very infrastructure meant to care for our elders disappear.

To put this in perspective, consider Ron Stanko and his daughter, Samantha.¹ Ron experienced a traumatic head injury later in life that left him 95 percent non-verbal and wheelchair-bound. He required a level of skilled nursing care that simply vanished from our county overnight. As a result, Samantha was forced to navigate a relocation for her father to a facility over an hour away from home. When we lose these facilities, we don't just lose beds; we lose the ability for families to be present for one another. No daughter should have to drive two hours round-trip just to hold her father's hand because the care he needs is no longer available in his own community.

Rate reform went into effect on January 1, 2025, and its first year has had some promising results. But, despite our collective efforts, we are still not out of the woods. A year of data has

¹ https://www.ellsworthamerican.com/news/business/hancock-countys-last-skilled-nursing-facility-plans-to-close/article_f4310a66-aa38-11ee-b6af-677ed79c3b67.html

shown us that some additional course corrections are needed to keep the remaining 78 facilities that accept Medicaid afloat. Ultimately, we must move beyond just preventing closures and build a system where it is viable for new facilities to open and meet the growing demand for care across our state.

What LD 2131 Does

This resolve is an emergency measure designed to stabilize our long-term care sector by ensuring that the funds this Legislature already appropriated actually reach the front lines. Here is what the bill requires:

- **Fixing the "Guardrails":** Currently, "guardrails" in the reimbursement formula are preventing 35 of Maine's 77 nursing facilities from receiving their legislatively-approved Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA). This bill directs DHHS to adjust these guardrails for inflation so that half of our state's nursing homes aren't left behind while facing rising costs.
- **Direct Care Add-on:** It partially reinstates the 2025 add-on to the direct care rate, at \$6.00 per MaineCare resident per day. This is a critical tool for the recruitment and retention of the staff who care for our neighbors. We've seen a reduction in reliance on expensive contract "travel" staff, but we must support facilities in hiring and keeping permanent, local teams.
- **Releasing Quality Bonuses:** Our nursing homes met the DHHS-mandated requirements for 2025 to earn quality bonus payments. LD 2131 requires the Department to release the \$8.1 million in earned Quality Bonus payments by March 1, 2026, using funds already in the Nursing Facility Transition Fund.

The Legislature established the Nursing Facility Transition Fund specifically to bridge the gap during the current 3-year rate transition and to support a high-quality, local direct-care workforce. LD 2131 would ensure that these funds are used where they will make the biggest difference for our providers and our seniors.

This bill is a critical adjustment to a complex system that, left untouched, could lead us back to a "cascade of closures" – a dire situation I do not wish on any other region of Maine. We cannot afford to lose the ground we've regained.

Thank you for your time and your commitment to Maine's older adults and disabled individuals. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.