



**Testimony of Jessica Fay for
The Maine Council on Aging
February 11, 2026
In Support of LD 2131**

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Jess Fay and I am the Policy and Advocacy Director for the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA), a broad, multidisciplinary network of over 140 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older community members working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged, and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age at home and in community settings. We are offering testimony in support of LD 2131, An Act to Preserve and Improve Access to Nursing Facility Services in the State.

Nursing facilities are a critical part of our healthcare system. Nursing facilities provide for the complex care needs of residents every day and play a critical role not only in the health of their residents, but also in the health of our families and communities. Without them, the continuum of care for older Mainers would fail. Nursing home care, hospital care, homecare and personal care are interdependent. Each setting must maintain stability so that the entire system remains stable. Essential care and support workers are the foundation for the care continuum and cost of living adjustments to the reimbursement for care in all settings must keep up with rising costs, especially the cost of labor.

The numbers tell a stark story: in 1995, there were 132 nursing homes in Maine. Now there are 79, with none remaining in Hancock County. This committee has heard these numbers before and has grappled with finding solutions to these difficult problems. Even as the Department of Health and Human Services and nursing facilities partner on promising comprehensive rate reform that prioritizes quality care and minimizes the use of contract labor, the costs to provide care keep rising and the reimbursement is falling behind.

Maine's healthcare workforce crisis is not a future threat—the collapse of this workforce is happening right now. Many workers cannot afford to continue in the field. They are being driven away by wages that have not kept pace with the rising cost of living. When facilities cannot maintain adequate staffing levels, everyone suffers: workers face impossible caseloads, and residents lose access to the attentive, dignified care they deserve.

LD 2131 requests a continuation of the MaineCare resident per day add-on for direct care at \$6, down from \$12.85 as the new rate model is phased in. Given the increase in the cost of benefits, wage compression, the competition for workers from outside the healthcare sector and the importance of maintaining staffing ratios for quality measures, this piece is critical. Essential

care and support workers are the backbone of nursing facility care. They are the professionals who help residents bathe, dress, eat, and live their lives. When we invest in direct care, we invest in quality outcomes for Maine people.

This bill also requires that the Quality Bonus pool funds be distributed according to the rules established by the Department. Nursing facilities have spent hours of staff time learning about and implementing quality metrics. These payments were to be disbursed in December of 2025 and have not, as of yet, been made. By distributing bonuses by March 1, 2026, we reward facilities that are doing the work and incentivize continued quality improvements. When payments are delayed, experienced workers are lost, capacity is reduced and it is more difficult to maintain care quality.

Cost of living adjustments must keep up with the cost of providing care across the entire continuum. LD 2131 provides a mechanism for this committee and for the Legislature to do just that for nursing homes while the Department finalizes the transition to the new value and quality based system. We cannot afford to lose any more nursing facilities, particularly in rural and northern Maine, as we wait for full implementation of the rate reform that this committee and the Legislature codified in 2024.

Please vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 2131. This bill seeks to reinforce an investment in Maine's healthcare infrastructure and in the workers who make quality care possible. Thank you.