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IN SUPPORT

LD 2131, An Act to Preserve and Improve Access to Nursing Facility Services in the State
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
February 11, 2026

Good morning, Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Nicole Marchesi. I am the Public Policy Advocate for the Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program.

The Ombudsman Program provides statewide advocacy for residents of nursing homes, residential care and assisted living, participants in adult day programs and recipients of home care services. Additionally, the program serves patients in hospitals ready for discharge that encounter barriers in accessing the long-term services and supports they need.

I am pleased to provide testimony in support of this legislation that would provide a cost-of-living adjustment retroactive to January 1, 2026, reimbursement to include a \$6.00/day add on to the direct care portion of nursing facility rates for each MaineCare resident. Additionally, it directs the Department to distribute the calendar year 2025 Quality Bonus Pool payments from the existing resources within the Nursing Facility Transition fund no later than March 1, 2026. Recruitment and retention of staff along with adequate staffing levels are critical in providing quality of care to residents in nursing homes. Reimbursement sufficient to allow competitive wages is a primary factor in both retention and recruitment of staff. Additionally, staffing vacancies have made it necessary for some nursing homes to rely on temporary staffing agencies at a much higher cost. In fact, we spoke with the CFO of a provider with many long-term care facilities across the state who told us that the agency hourly rate for CNAs ranges from \$36.00 - \$60.00. The hourly rate for LPNs ranges from \$57.00 - \$72.00. The hourly rate for R.N.s is \$85.00 - \$90.00. While nursing homes have made progress in reducing the use of agency staffing, it is still a factor for many homes that impacts their costs.

Maine nursing homes have committed to working on quality measures that include recruitment and retention of staff, reduction in the use of antipsychotic medications and resident satisfaction

surveys. These efforts are supported with funds from the Quality Bonus Payment Pool included in this legislation.

Finally, we thought you would be interested to know that the Ombudsman Program has received a grant from the Bingham Program for a project that will support nursing homes in implementing strategies that support staff retention. We will be reaching out to national experts who will assist us in identifying approaches that nursing homes can utilize to promote the retention of direct care staff. As we move forward with this project, we will be glad to share with you the progress that we are able to make in supporting staff retention in nursing homes.

Thank you for your consideration.