



Testimony of Jena Jones

LD 2228, An Act to Eliminate Inactive Boards and Commissions

Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

March 18, 2026

Good afternoon Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government..

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in opposition to the elimination of the Essential Support Workforce Advisory Committee (ESWAC) in LD 2228, An Act to Eliminate Inactive Boards and Commissions.

My name is Jena Jones, and I am the Policy and Advocacy Manager of the Maine Association for Community Service Providers (MACSP). MACSP represents nearly 100 community-based organizations delivering person-centered case management, educational, vocational, residential, and community-based supports, as well as specialized services, to more than 2,000 children and 5,000 adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and brain injuries across Maine. These services are delivered by a dedicated workforce of approximately 9,000 direct support professionals and are foundational to supporting independence and full, inclusive lives in the community.

I am here today on behalf of MACSP's member organizations to respectfully urge the Committee to amend LD 2228 to remove Essential Support Workforce Advisory Committee as proposed for elimination in this bill, as it is an active body that is statutorily authorized to continue its work until January 1, 2028.

MACSP values and supports the work of the ESWAC which examines workforce needs across service sectors that rely on direct care workers and monitors shortages, recruitment, and retention efforts to strengthen this essential workforce. A MACSP board member currently serves on the Committee as Vice Chair.

Across the state, every day Mainers rely upon members of the direct care workforce, like the Direct Support Professionals who support people with disabilities, to ensure they can remain safely and securely in their homes, connected to employment, social opportunities and fully engaged in their communities.

However, access to this vital workforce continues to be constrained by historic undervaluing, low and stagnant wages, and limited access to benefits. These challenges have had significant impacts across the direct care and supports system. We continue to see the impacts of this instability across the state in shuttered facilities, closed programs, and high turnover and vacancy rates.

The current challenges related to service delivery across the I/DD, older adult, and behavioral health sectors make the ongoing work of the ESWAC critical. The Committee remains one of the most consistent and reliable vehicles for collaboration between providers, legislators, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Department of Labor. It is rare to have such a forum to identify and respond to workforce-related challenges to enhance the delivery of services for people who rely on direct care workers.

The most recent annual report filed in March of this year indicates the Committee received updates from DHHS, DOL, and provider agencies, evaluated wages and benefits for workers, considered credentialing challenges and opportunities to strengthen educational offerings, and methods for enhanced data collection and reporting. Based on this work, the Committee is also able to make recommendations to the legislature to stabilize and ultimately grow the direct care workforce.

Notably, the Health and Human Services Committee has unanimously supported LD 1932 *An Act to Support Essential Support Workers and Enhance Workforce Development*, proposes to expand ESWAC's membership to include additional representation from personal care agencies and the long-term care ombudsman program. This legislative action underscores both the relevance and continued importance of the Committee's work.

For all of these reasons, I respectfully urge you to amend LD 2228 to remove the Essential Support Workforce Advisory Committee from consideration for elimination as an inactive board or commission.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jena Jones
Policy and Advocacy Manager