



Testimony of Mollie Baldwin, Executive Director, Home Care for Maine

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

In Support of LD 643, Resolve, Directing the Department of Health and Human Services To Increase Reimbursement Rates for Home-based and Community-based Services

Sponsored by Representative Espling on March 27, 2017

Good morning, Senator Brakey, Representative Hymanson and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Mollie Baldwin. I am a resident of Nobleboro, a registered nurse and the Director of Home Care for Maine. Home Care for Maine provides personal care and homemaking services to nearly 800 elderly and disabled adults across the state every day, allowing them to remain in their home. We employ 475 direct care workers. Ninety percent of our agency's revenue comes from MaineCare and State funded reimbursement. I am here to testify in support of LD 643, Resolve, Directing the Department of Health and Human Services to Increase Reimbursement Rates for Home-based and Community-based Services up to rates determined by the Burns Study.

We want to proactively address the needs of our growing elder adult population. They want to stay in their homes as long as they can. This is significantly less expensive for MaineCare than placing them in an institutional setting. We can't do this without competent, qualified workers.

The reimbursement rate for Personal Care Services under Sections 19 and 96 of the MaineCare program and under Section 63, the State funded homecare program, had not been increased since 2005 until many of you currently on this Committee and at the Department began to address this issue eighteen months ago. We are thankful for the prior allocations that have been made due to your hard work and diligence. We have just received the first check at the new reimbursement rate retroactive to July 29, 2016. We will be adding temporary staff to rebill the claims under MaineCare back to July 29, 2016 and money in the Agency's account, once the policy is adopted.

Every year it is more difficult for us to hire people to perform the basic personal care tasks that allow elder and disabled MaineCare members to remain in their homes. We cannot be competitive, especially in light of the minimum wage increase and its projected change annually going forward. We have been able to increase our average hourly wage from \$10.10 to \$10.91 as a result of the last increase and our workers received a 3% wage increase July 1, 2017. However, this wage even though it is higher, has not make it any easier to recruit new workers or keep qualified ones. The yearly turnover rate for our agency right remains at 50%. Our workers leave our agency for fulltime jobs with full benefits almost daily. Additionally, our health insurance premiums jumped 39%. This impacts the ability of eligible workers to afford their share of the premium costs. Absorption of the employer share under current reimbursement rates continues to jeopardize the fiscal viability of our agency. As it stands today, we are in deficit spending because of the delay in adoption of the rules implementing the higher rate. Our Board moved forward increasing worker wages based on adopted legislation.

Our employees are some of the most dedicated people I know. They travel long distances, often venturing all alone into the homes of strangers, to do the basic, but no less essential tasks that keep our elder adults in their homes. Some of these workers aren't that much younger or that much better off financially than the people they are taking care of - 25% of them receive some form of assistance from the State. Our workers deserve better pay that reflects the value of the work they do and the importance we place in taking care of our most vulnerable population. I appreciate the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions and will be present for the work session.