

**TESTIMONY OF Richard A. Erb
President and CEO
Maine Health Care Association**

April 20, 2021, Noon

To the Joint Standing Committee on Health & Human Services

In Support of L.D. 878

Resolve, To Increase MaineCare Rates for Services Provided by Direct Care Workers

Good afternoon, Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and members of the Committee. My name is Rick Erb and I am the President and CEO of the Maine Health Care Association. Our organization represents the majority of the state's nursing homes and assisted living facilities. I am here to testify in support of LD 878 today and thank Senator Keim and the cosponsors for bringing this issue forward.

It is a pleasure to testify in favor of a bill that benefits the people we consider the backbone of long term care. Wages and benefits are typically 70% of a facility's operating expenses, and the largest group of employees by far is direct care staff. COVID-19 has put the spotlight on the incredibly valuable work they do, but honestly, we at Maine Health Care Association already considered them heroes.

The bill is very straightforward in calling for and funding a \$2.00 per hour increase in the wages for these individuals. It comes at a critical time, as the shortage of workers has become more dire, as the pandemic drags on. Nursing homes and assisted living facilities struggle more than ever to find and retain workers. Wages have indeed increased substantially over the past few years, driven my competition from other sectors. But what we pay still undervalues the people who care for our elderly and disabled. Certified nursing assistants and personal support specialists certainly realize there are easier ways to make a living for similar pay. Earlier this year, our surveys showed that the average CNA and PSS were earning around \$16 and \$14 per hour respectively. Adding \$2.00 to their hourly rate isn't a fortune, but on top of wage increases that facilities are already granting, it makes a difference – for the employee trying to make a living and for the facility that needs to recruit and retain direct care workers..

LD 878 is a common sense bill that puts money in the hands of our valued staff and takes advantage of federal matching funds. I urge the Committee to vote “ought to pass”. Thank you.