



## **TESTIMONY**

In Support Of

**LD: 878 Resolve, to Increase MaineCare Reimbursement Rates for Services Provided by Direct Care Workers**

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Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

**April 20, 2021**

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and committee members, my name is Brenda Gallant. I am the Long-Term Care Ombudsman. The Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program is a statewide non-profit organization that provides advocacy for older adults and adults with disabilities who receive long-term services and supports in all settings. We serve residents in nursing homes, assisted housing including residential care and assisted living facilities, adult day programs and recipients of home care services. Additionally, we serve patients in hospitals who experience barriers in accessing long-term services and supports.

We are pleased to provide testimony in support of this legislation that requires the Department of Health and Human Services to increase reimbursement rates in both home and community based settings and long-term care facilities to provide a \$2.00/hour increase for direct care workers. We know that worker wages have a significant impact on recruitment and retention of direct care staff. This complex work demands a high degree of skill and dedication. Direct care wages should reflect the demands that are placed on workers.

Before the pandemic, providers across the continuum of long-term services and supports faced significant challenges in finding staff to provide care. Many facilities had to resort to using staffing agencies in order to find sufficient numbers of staff to provide care to residents. As you know, staffing agencies are much more expensive and often, the staff do not know the residents. This creates the problem of inconsistent care and may impact quality of care provided to residents.

COVID-19 has created additional barriers in finding staff so that many nursing facilities have had to limit admissions. As a result, access to nursing facility care has been impacted so that

patients in need of this care may wait in hospitals for admission. Additionally, older and disabled adults in the community who need nursing facility care may also wait for extended periods of time for admission.

There is nothing more important to nursing facility residents than the staff who provide their care. Study after study of staffing in nursing facilities indicate that there is a direct correlation between the availability of direct care staff and quality of care. Staff in assisted housing is equally important to residents served in those settings. About 1/4 to 1/3 of residents are nursing facility eligible but have chosen to age in place.

The availability of staff to provide home care services is critical to the wellbeing of home care recipients. The Ombudsman Program has worked with a number of older and disabled adults eligible for home care services without the staff to provide care.

- A woman at home with dementia is being taken care of by her daughter who is a teacher. Because the daughter needs to go back to work, home care staff is needed. However, none can be found. The daughter is running out of time under the FMLA.
- A woman in her 70's, eligible for the section 19 waiver, attempted to hire staff under the consumer directed model. Staffing could not be found. As a result, she is asking us for help to move to a nursing home.
- A man in his 60's needed assistance to get from his wheel chair to his bed. Without staffing, he was forced to sit in his chair all day. He developed pressure ulcers and was admitted to the hospital. He asked us for help in finding a nursing home.

Unfortunately, these stories are not unique. Thousands of hours of home care services go unstaffed each week.

We believe that wage increases are critical in recruitment and retention of direct staff.

Thank you for your consideration.