

**Testimony of  
Donald Harden, on Behalf of Catholic Charities Maine  
Regarding LD 878; "Resolve To Increase MaineCare Reimbursement Rates for Services  
Provided by Direct Care Workers."  
Delivered in writing to the  
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services  
April 20, 2021**

Greetings, Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health & Human Services Committee:

My name is Don Harden and I am submitting testimony on behalf of Catholic Charities Maine, an agency I have been affiliated with for over 41 years most recently as Director of Aging Services. I am testifying in favor of LD 878.

As one of Maine's largest, community-based, social service agencies we provided help and hope to 101,857 Mainer's last year. An important part of our mission is providing services to older Mainer's. This includes the Independent Support Services Program, also known as the State Homemaker Program a general funded service under Section 69. The ISS Program assists individuals *who otherwise could not live independently* with such things as housekeeping, laundry, meal preparation, grocery shopping, and transportation for errands and appointments. Last year under ISS we served 2130 consumers in homes across all 16 counties.

- ISS consumers are highly resilient and fiercely independent but need physical assist with the most basic of daily tasks.
- They are older adults with 70% over 65 at an average age of 71
- Most are on fixed incomes needing supports that will exceed their financial means.
- Many are living in stressed housing, food insecure, socially isolated, 56% live alone, with inadequate supports, something that has magnified under COVID as access to family and community members has become more challenging.
- Most have complex medical issues with problems accessing physician care often dependent on local public safety and emergency response.

During 2019, I served on the Commission to Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues. At that time our report detailed unstaffed hours and waitlists for services and the demographics of a rapidly aging state, predicting that the mismatch between services needed and workers available will only become more acute. We currently have 1,114 people on our ISS Homemaker wait list, and 240 consumers on our unstaffed list, because we can't hire enough staff.

As an employer we have taken extraordinary steps to try to keep up with the external forces making it difficult to compete for workforce within the limits of current reimbursement. We have implemented incentives to try to retain our current workers and have expanded utilization of the self-direct care option to involve consumers in recruiting their own worker. We are already paying beyond minimum wage and are still not competitively positioned in most areas of the state to ensure adequate workforce.

The result is a serious lack of equity and access to care for older Maine citizens. Consumers not able to access adequate in-home care are placed at risk and diminished quality of life, end up accessing local ER visits and hospital stays and placed in higher level, more expensive care unnecessarily sometimes because their family members can't do it any more at great public and personal cost.

When we experience direct care worker shortages, it's also bad for our economy. Caregivers in the workplace managing gaps in care may be less productive and involve higher rates of absenteeism. Employees not able to access in-home care for family members often choose to move to part-time or leave employment; resulting in a loss of experience and skills; and recruitment and re-training costs to employer.

LD 878 would increase rates of pay for direct care workers by increasing reimbursement rates for services by no less than \$2 an hour. When the Commission Report was released a year ago it included recommendations that needed to be implemented immediately. These included increases in reimbursement necessary to increase wages for direct care workers and to cover structural additions to provider costs that compete in the provider budgets with necessary spending on recruitment and retention. The urgency is now. I urge consideration of rate increases for essential LTSS services to ensure access to services for older Mainer's.

Thank you for your consideration and your service to Maine's citizens.