

**Testimony of Betsy Mahoney, Community Outreach Coordinator,
Autism Society of Maine, in Support of LD 1157, An Act To Ensure MaineCare
Reimbursement Rates for Home and Community-based Services for Persons with
Intellectual Disabilities or Autism Are Adjusted in Accordance with Increases in
State and Municipal Minimum Wage**



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Good afternoon Senator Claxton, Rep. Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Betsy Mahoney, and I am the Community Outreach Coordinator of the Autism Society of Maine. I am also the parent of a 30-year-old with autism, intellectual disabilities and a mental health diagnosis who lives in a group home. I am testifying today on behalf of the Autism Society in support of LD 1157, which Ensure MaineCare Reimbursement Rates for Home and Community-based Services for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities or Autism Are Adjusted in Accordance with Increases in State and Municipal Minimum Wage.

The Autism Society supports this and other bills being heard today that aim to increase wages for direct support professionals. The severe shortage of these professionals remains a critical problem for families with individuals who need care and for the agencies that serve them. Community service providers still have a lot of trouble filling vacancies at these homes, and experience high staff.

Low wages translate into staff vacancies and high staff turnover, which in turn contributes to lesser care and a lack of stability in these homes. Consistency and stability among staff are key to the mental and physical health of many of these residents. Knowing what to expect —and who to expect-- each day contributes greatly to their ability to function. Additionally, experienced staff are more likely to have learned how to handle the sometimes-difficult behaviors of those on the autism spectrum.

With the State's low unemployment rate and the recent increase in the minimum wage, agencies that employ caregivers are able to pay only slightly above the minimum wage. A job seeker without skills can often find a relatively stress-free job at a retail outlet instead of working in a challenging environment such as the home where my son lives.

LD 1157 requires the Department of Health and Human Services to increase its reimbursement rates to providers of home and community-based services to persons with intellectual disabilities or autism by the same amount of increase required under the minimum wage law or by a municipal ordinance.

In the fall of 2019, the Commission To Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues released a report that included a draft bill that implemented the recommendations of the Commission. This Committee voted to introduce that bill and voted in favor of it. We believe that the components of that bill are a good way to address the workforce crisis.

Specifically, the bill required direct care workers across the long-term care spectrum to be paid no less than 125% of the minimum wage. It required DHS to adopt rules that take into account the cost of this increased wage in its MaineCare reimbursement rates.

It also required the Department to increase reimbursement rates under MaineCare to take into account costs of providing care in conformity with applicable state and federal laws, including increases in the minimum wage, earned paid leave and other costs that are not provided for in the current reimbursement rates.

Our loved ones who need home and community-based services can wait no longer for Maine to address the workforce shortage. We strongly urge this committee to pass some form of reimbursement increase that addresses this problem.

