



LD 1528: Resolve, Directing the Department of Health and Human Services To Adjust Reimbursement Rates for Certain Home-based Services

April 27, 2021

Position: Support

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Susan White, and I am a resident of South Portland. I am the Administrator and Director of Nursing at COR Health, a home care agency that provides in-home RN and LPN care to children and adults throughout Maine. COR Health is also a longstanding member of the Home Care & Hospice Alliance of Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 1528 as presented by Representative Stover.

Home Health improves patient lives by providing customized care plans to meet the individual's needs in the comfort of their home. We help family members retain employment opportunities by providing a safe alternative to meet the medically complex needs of their loved ones in their absence. We care for clients with chronic, debilitating conditions—many having serious medical conditions that result in impaired physical and/or cognitive status requiring extensive, skilled hands-on care. Our patients may require extraordinary supervision, critical assessment for early detection of developing health issues, and lifesaving medication administration. Medically complex clients are often reliant upon “around the clock” staffing to provide safe continual care.

Our dedicated RNs and LPNs educate, advocate, assess, and provide interventions that promote health and well-being to our clients – many of whom are children and young adults. By keeping them out of institutionalized settings, we help maximize their overall well-being by keeping them in their own home while minimizing the overall cost of care.

Clients' needs range from basic activities of daily living such as toileting and bathing to more skilled needs. These needs such as seizure management, feeding tube maintenance, medication administration, airway/ ventilation care, as well as several other interventions are customarily delivered in acute, institutional settings by professional RNs and/or LPNs.

For example, a medically complex client may have respiratory issues as the qualifier for RN services in the home. The RN meets the need for frequent respiratory assessment and interventions, such as suctioning, chest percussions, administration of nebulizers or inhalers, trach care, oxygen administration, pulse oximetry monitoring, vital sign assessment, and frequent communication with the physician. The RN may obtain orders to treat an infection or new interventions to improve respiratory function. The ultimate goal would be to keep the client from needing to be admitted to the hospital.

It has been and continues to be a hardship for our agency to recruit and retain these essential caregivers. We cannot offer competitive pay rates to RNs and LPNs who are interested in pursuing home health careers. We frequently lose applicants after the interview is complete because we cannot

match offers being made by long-term care and acute care facilities. Candidates are often surprised upon learning of pay discrepancies in home health as compensation isn't equitable with other care settings.

Home Health RN and LPN staff face many challenges, such as an increased risk of lifting injuries from lack of equipment, poorly configured homes, travel-related expenses in driving to and from homes, and the risk of violence in client homes. The RN/LPN working in home health must be adequately trained and confident in their skills since they spend most of their time independently responsible for any emergency intervention needed. This requires a certain level of competence and experience, along with an expectation of fair and comparable wages.

We need to be able to offer competitive pay and benefits to recruit and retain qualified staff. LD 1528 addresses this issue by increasing the MaineCare bill rates by 39% for RN and LPN staff. This increase would allow Home Health agencies to be more competitive with nurses' pay rates for retention purposes and increase the rates being offered for new applicants.

I appreciate your time and consideration of this critical decision. Feel free to call me at 536-2563 or contact me via email at swhite@corhealthservices.com with any subsequent questions that may arise.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S White', with a stylized, cursive script.

Susan White, RN, BSN, MBA