

May 3, 2021

LD 1573

Thank you for the opportunity to advocate for LD 1573 An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Study Long-term Care workforce issues on behalf of my patients, caregivers, and inter-professional team. I am the program director for Maine Dartmouth Family Medicine Residency's geriatric medicine fellowship and medical director of Maine Dartmouth Geriatric Medicine. As the Program Director of a comprehensive geriatric medicine program that serves older adults across the continuum of care (outpatient, hospital, assisted living, nursing home, and home settings) and the Medical Director for a geriatric primary care and specialty consultative practice located in Augusta, I am deeply concerned about the direct caregiver workforce shortage and the grave impact this is having on older adults and the broader community in Maine.

Every day we care for older adults who prioritize staying as independent as possible for as long as possible in their communities. Having available intermittent care at home is an essential part of assuring this can safely happen. This may be someone to help with mid-day medications, check that a nutritious meal is eaten, or assure safe transitions into and out of the shower. These things may seem small, but every day, geriatricians see older adults losing weight from missed meals, experiencing the effects of missed medications, and falling at home alone without help around. This leads to potentially avoidable emergency department visits, prolonged hospitalizations, and transitions to long-term care settings. Also, we routinely encounter caregivers struggling with depression, anxiety, and physical symptoms due to significant stress as they often have no help or respite, and at times bring their loved ones to the Emergency Department because they can no longer provide 24/7 care. Currently, we have dozens of patients on the waitlist for Section 63 home-based care. Many of these patients transition to Assisted Living or Nursing Homes due to the lack of available home care services. Transitions to long term care settings often create profound sadness and guilt for caregivers that is then compounded by perceived staffing shortages in these settings that are not adequate to meet the needs of loved ones. Staffing shortages also contribute to avoidable emergency department transfers, hospitalizations, and costs of care.

It is evident that the direct caregiver workforce shortage across the continuum of care is having deleterious effects on person-centered care and contributing to rising costs of care. Modifying funding strategies and creating innovative pathways to provide caregiving services in the face of the current direct caregiver workforce shortage crisis is essential to addressing the direct and indirect caregiver burden impacts on many Maine families and workplaces. LD 1573 represents a promising pathway forward to recruiting, training, and retaining a direct caregiver workforce to support the needs of Maine people. This helps ensure adequate home care is available and transitions to long-term care settings are adequately staffed to prevent unnecessary hospitalizations and optimize the health and well-being for older adults in Maine.

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