



Written Testimony in Support of LD 1573

An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues

Committee on Health and Human Services

Monday, May 3, 2021

Good morning, Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Laura Cordes, executive director of the Maine Association for Community Service Providers. MACSP is the association of more than 70 organizations providing direct service and support to children, adolescents, and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) to live and thrive in our Maine communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to come before you today to provide testimony in support of LD 1573 *An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues*.

I want to acknowledge both Representative Fay for her leadership and dedication in carrying this bill forward, as well as all of the members of the *Commission To Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues* for their work to identify a set of bi-partisan recommendations and for recognizing that that real short term and long-term solutions are needed to secure the staff needed to provide the vital daily supports to thousands of Maine's most vulnerable adults, including adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities or autism.

We have been talking about outdated and underfunded MainCare rates and the workforce shortage crisis for people who provide essential care, support and services to Mainers for far too long. We all know that the pandemic has only compounded the crisis.

Last March, we joined more than three hundred Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), advocates, parents, and allies in support of LD 2109, the similar bill which put forward the Commission's recommendations, including raising rates for Direct Care Workforce including DSPs, to be supported with a wage 25% *above* minimum wage.

This is the level of support we need in our state to begin to rebuild the essential care workforce that thousands of Mainers including adults with I/DD must rely on to provide the quality and vital care they need, deserve and have a right to.

For providers supporting adults with I/DD in small group homes, the wage rate component has been below minimum wage for three years. Today at \$11.21 an hour, it is \$0.94 below the current minimum wage of \$12.15 an hour. This has meant that throughout the state, the majority of our providers have been unable to

support staff with incentive or hazard pay during this pandemic, let alone compete with Walmart or fast-food restaurants to offer a competitive wage.

Since the pandemic began we have lost 16-20% of the workforce supporting Mainers with IDD - that's 1600-2000, Direct Support Professionals. Deeply fatigued and frustrated, DSPs have left jobs and people they care for, for higher-paying, lower-stress and lower-risk positions.

New applicants are not coming through the door. Without enough staff, providers are faced with skyrocketing overtime costs that must be paid as they are needed just to keep basic supports in place.

At a time when providers should be planning to support people returning home or re-engaging fully in the community, the low rates, loss of staff, lack of applicants and weight of the additional pandemic costs has put providers in an untenable position. Providers are slowly collapsing programs, services, and group homes while hours of authorized services for Mainers who need them go unfilled and nearly 2000 Mainers remain on the waitlists.

We appreciate the work that the Department has done to understand and acknowledge the need for consistent rate methodology and adjustments. The implementation plan from the recently released Rate System Evaluation however will take many years to implement for the direct care workforce across the board.

In the year ahead, the Department does plan to increase the wage components of Sections 21 and 29 rates to minimum wage. While this is certainly a welcome measure, in order to secure and retain a specialized, compassionate and essential direct care workforce we must move *beyond* minimum wage, to rates that will support a *competitive* wage.

We can't wait. We need the solutions and rates that support wages for direct care workers at 125% of minimum wage found in LD 1574 to bridge us to the MaineCare rate system that the State is building for the future. With a \$460 million dollar state budget surplus and hundreds of millions of Federal dollars on the way, now is the time to invest in Mainers who care for Mainers and to lift up essential workers and the thousands of individuals and their families who rely on them.

Thank you again for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have now or as you prepare for work sessions.

Respectfully Submitted,
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