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I am writing on behalf of LeadingAge Maine & New Hampshire, the association of not-for-profit, senior living communities and long-term care providers in Maine and New Hampshire. Of the 51 member facilities, 25 are located in Maine. They are united by their missions to provide quality, flexible and innovative residential care.

Our members faced severe workforce shortages prior to the emergence of COVID-19, and now the problem is far worse. Being a direct caregiver is hard work. During the pandemic, it also became dangerous work. As a State, we have undervalued direct care workers and the essential services they provide, and now the current workforce is running on fumes. Until Maine prioritizes and funds a variety of strategies to support the recruitment and retention of direct care workers, we will continue to see an erosion of the workforce.

Aging services providers have already exhausted their own limited funds to offer workforce incentives. They've offered free CNA training classes, paid sign-on bonuses over \$1,000 per new employee and acquiesced to the price gouging practices of staffing agencies. Meanwhile, the State of Maine has virtually no skin in the game. We can either continue to study the problem to death, or we can do something about it.

LD 1573 An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues is one such vehicle for action. This bill implements some of the key recommendations from the report of Commission to Study Long Term Care Workforce Issues.

Among other provisions, it establishes a minimum wage for many direct care worker jobs that is set at 125% higher than minimum wage and is automatically increased. This is paired with a requirement that the Department of Health and Human Services to adopt rules to provide reimbursement rates sufficient for structural costs. It is critical that MaineCare reimbursement rates reflect all costs to providers and account for market forces and salaries for offered by competing professions. Rates must be set sufficiently high enough to ensure sufficient workers are entering and remaining in this workforce.

LeadingAge Maine & New Hampshire urges your support of LD 1573.