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To the Distinguished Chairpeople and Honorable Members of the Health & Human Services Committee. I am testifying in FAVOR of LD 1574, An Act to Ensure Support for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities or Autism with High Behavioral Need and in FAVOR of LD 1573, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues.

Jake, my 33 year old son lives with my husband and me. He is challenged with dual diagnoses, meaning he has multiple developmental disabilities including an autism spectrum disorder and a significant mental illness. Some years his disability becomes apparent because, when overwhelmed, he destroys things, threatens others, and harms himself. Nowadays, his anxiety is rarely expressed as rage, but he stops speaking, stops moving, ceases to be responsive.

Recently we've been lucky with a direct support professional. New to the field, this talented young woman has creatively wormed her way into Jake's world. She capitalizes on Jake's good stretches and deftly switches strategies when he's having a hard time. Yet I can promise you, she will leave this field within a year, because her wage does not match the pay of jobs that do not have, as part of the job description, "walking a tightrope while protecting myself and my client".

In the last two years, 5 such DSPs left us within a month of starting, and 3 potential hires resigned during their training, before even their first day of work. Remember, my family is but one of the hundreds that is unable to acquire consistent care providers for their family member with high behavioral needs. Yet we Mainers somehow disrespect the profession of CARE, and the net result guarantees a tax funded constant churn of recruits who resign quickly, leaving people like Jake and families like mine in a lurch.

Without the appropriate support of a knowledgeable, well-trained, well-supervised workforce, people who sometimes express their frustration through challenging behavior can exist, but not thrive. Jake will continue to lose the ability to see himself as useful, because he rarely has skilled staff who redirect him successfully, and he risks more negative consequences. Families and providers need to recruit skilled staff who can work with people with complex multiple disabilities. Better wages open the door to more employees and retention of this valuable human resource.

I urge you to pass these two bills, to develop a stable workforce, steeped in positive behavior techniques, growing alongside their clients, and acting as mentors to other Mainers eager to join a robust Care Economy offering quality supervision and training. It is wiser to invest on the front end, instead of spending the same public dollars on constantly replacing employees.

Further, I urge you to include specifically those Mainers with dual diagnoses among the category of people with high behavioral need.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my comments.

Respectfully,  
Maggie Hoffman