



May 3, 2021

Dear Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

I join you today on behalf of the Maine Women's Lobby. For over forty years, the Maine Women's Lobby has advocated for public policy which increases the health, wellness, safety, and economic security of Maine women and girls, with a focus on the most marginalized populations and communities.

We write today **in support of LD 1573, "An Act An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues."** We thank Representative Fay for sponsoring this bill.

Care work is part of the essential infrastructure of our economy and our communities. Care work is what ensures participation in the labor market – for the partners and children of aging adults, for the parents of children with certain disabilities, for families with a wide variety of needs. Care work provides respite to hard-working families. Care work provides competent, skilled support that family and friends are often unable to provide. **Care work is like the energy grid: often unseen, but it powers almost everything.**

Despite how essential this work is, caregivers—whether they care for children, elders, or differently abled people—are underpaid and undervalued. This is an issue of gender equity and racial equity: care workers are overwhelmingly women, and more likely to be women of color.¹

This lack of investment has had consequences. A 2019 survey of 81 nursing facilities in Maine showed that 60% of those facilities had limited admissions due to staffing shortages in the last 90 days.² On average, nursing facility workers in America make \$25,330 a year,³ which is well under Maine's livable wage rate for a person with a family. Without federal hazard pay it is unlikely this number will dramatically change this year, even though working in a nursing home is currently the most dangerous job in the country.⁴

It is time to rethink the sector, not only to acknowledge how essential care work is in our culture, but to acknowledge the extent to which women and women of color are filling these essential roles at a cost to themselves and their families. The Commission to Study Long-Term Care Workforce Issues recognized the need to stop tinkering and create substantive change

¹ Institute for Women's Policy Research, & OXFAM. (2016). *Undervalued and Underpaid in America: The Deck Is Stacked against Millions of Working Women*. Retrieved August 13, 2020.

² 2019 Admissions Survey. (2019). Retrieved August 13, 2020, from <http://legislature.maine.gov/doc/3182>

³ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (May 2018). *Occupational Employment and Wages: Home Health Care Workers*. Retrieved August 13, 2020 from <https://www.bls.gov/oes/2018/may/oes311011.htm>

⁴ Haug, O. C. (2020, August 03). Nursing Home and Care Workers Officially the Most Dangerous Job in the U.S. Retrieved August 13, 2020, from <https://msmagazine.com/2020/08/03/nursing-home-and-care-workers-officially-the-most-dangerous-job-in-the-u-s/>



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in the way we recruit and retain the care workforce – and by extension create stability and equity for multiple communities and populations in Maine. LD 1573 recognizes the import of the Commission's work, seeks to implement several pieces of it, and most importantly, creates an ongoing oversight body which can continue the essential work.

Care workers power our communities. But under our current system, people who need care support can't access it, and people who provide care work can't meet their own families' needs on the reimbursement structure. **It is overwhelmingly women and women of color who fill the gaps and live with the consequences of our crumbling care infrastructure, and it doesn't have to be this way.**

LD 1573 takes important steps forward to re-envisioning this sector. Implementing the Commission's recommendations and providing long-term oversight can ultimately expand access to essential care for all Mainers, while ensuring that care workers earn a living that is commensurate with the incredible value that they provide to our communities.

Please vote 'ought to pass' on LD 1573.

Sincerely,

Destie Hohman Sprague, Executive Director
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