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Written Testimony in Support of LD 1573
An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Study Long-term Care
Workforce Issues
Health and Human Services Committee
Monday, May 3, 2021

Good afternoon, Senator Claxton, Representative Myer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 1573 An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues.

My name is Ryan Jackson. I am a licensed social worker (LSW) working for an agency in Mid-Coast Maine that supports individuals with intellectual disabilities in residential facilities (Group Homes) located in Knox and Waldo County. I am writing to advocate for supporting State of Maine DSPs with 125% of the minimum wage for the following reasons:

The social work field has been dwindling throughout the past 6 years that I have been in the field. Not only have other careers increased their wages throughout the state, but the older people aging out of the workforce that have made a career of taking care of people with disabilities are not being replaced by the younger generations. Largely in part due to the low wages approved of for reimbursement from MaineCare for the services provided to one of the neediest populations of people in our state. The issue of low wages starts with the reimbursement to community providers. Raising wages without raising the reimbursement rates would certainly put the state in more of a workforce crisis not only on the frontline, but also administratively.

Typically, overtime can vary between a few hours to over 10 or more throughout any given week. This stems from a severe shortage in applicants and turnover due to workers leaving for retail positions, which are paying anywhere from \$15 to \$20 per hour and no experience being needed. Since Christmas of 2020, we have been dealing with approximately 160-250 hours of missing shifts that are taken up by overtime slots at time and a half rate. Just to show figures of what I am describing, a DSP at minimum wage working a 40-hour week while also picking up two extra shifts per week comes out to \$291.68. In the event that an agency has to replace 250 hours of work in a week, the overtime costs could be as much as \$4,557.50. This is an increase in the ballpark of \$1,500.00 per week.

Since the issues of staffing have become prevalent throughout the last few years, I personally have noticed far more medication administration errors being made by staff as they are being asked to work two shifts back-to-back. Even when the homes institute a two staff administration process at med times, this becomes more difficult to attend to the residents who are not receiving medications or ensure accurate administration to the people who need them at med pass time.

Raising the rates has been a topic that has been floating around the State of Maine's Department of Health and Human Services for the last few years, but has been tabled for reasons never really explained, which has gone on long enough. Without the appropriate funding resources and the Department following through with their end of the increase, the State will eventually be considered an entity that "fails to thrive" when it comes to supporting their residents who work for group home agencies. The Department has always expressed its gratitude towards DSP's and made points to thank them in times where the public eye is watching. In my opinion when it comes to standing up for what DHHS truly believes in, the local DSPs still remain to be working in a thankless field as the payment for the grueling work continues to be swept under the rug and decisions continue to be made at the state level by individuals who have never worked in the field themselves or understand the difficulties that this population has faced.

I feel comfortable speaking for those whom I supervise as well as my colleagues that the need to raise the rates to provide adequate wages is a must. In doing so, the State of Maine and its workers providing supports to those who are intellectually disabled will have the opportunity to become more qualified and provide crisis services time to do their work when we can finally establish a reliable and/or consistent workforce.

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