



Testimony of Jeff Johnson, Director of Operations for Bridges Home Services (a division of Spectrum Generations)

To Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

In Favor of LD 1573 –An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues

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Thank you, Senate Chair Claxton, House Chair Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services for this opportunity today to bring attention to the importance of implementing the recommendations of the Commission to Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues.

My name is Jeff Johnson, and I'm the Director of Operations for Bridges Home Services, a division of Spectrum Generations. Spectrum Generations operates Bridges Home Services, who has provided in-home care and community supports to older and disabled citizens for more than 25 years. Bridges has a current workforce of more than 200 direct care and administrative staff, and provides over 180,000 hours of MaineCare services each year. One of our direct care staff members proudly served on this Commission, and Bridges Home Services strongly supports this bill.

The long-term care industry relies upon the relationship of service providers, direct care workers, and funding sources like MaineCare in order to deliver effective long term care to consumers. That relationship has been and continues to be in crisis. The crisis stems from a MaineCare reimbursement process that is inadequate and does not address the dynamic needs the provider, the worker, nor the consumer in which they serve.

As the population in Maine ages, there is a growing requirement for in-home and community-based services to promote and advance the well-being and independence of older and disabled adults so they may live in their community of choice. After a lifetime of working and paying taxes, many older and disabled adults utilize MaineCare to supplement their Medicare healthcare benefits. These are your parents, grandparents, your aunts and uncles, and your neighbors. And they need help in the activities of their daily life; if help is not available, they become sick, isolated, routinely hospitalized, and too often institutionalized at great expense to the taxpayer.

Currently, the reimbursement rate for PSS services, Adult Day, and Community Support services does not provide enough compensation to attract direct care workers to meet the growing demand for services. To be frank, our agency struggles every day to hire and retain the direct care workforce we employ. Our staff provides necessary care for Maine's older and disabled population, and they deserve to be paid more. However Bridges, and agencies like ours, are paying their employees the highest wage allowed under the current reimbursement rate and it is just not enough. We continue to lose employees to industries that can raise wages to attract workers and simply pass this cost on to consumers. Our workers continually cite compensation, their ability to provide for their own families as they care for others, as the number one reason they depart our agency. LD1573 takes the first step in solving that issue through mandating workers are paid 125% of the current minimum wage.

MaineCare reimbursement rates must also keep pace to offset large changes to costs, such as increases to minimum wage. Agencies are continually faced with increased costs associated to wages, benefits, liability insurance, transportation, earned paid leave, and other mandates like electronic visit

verification. With agencies already experiencing slim margins, and more often than not deficit positions, it is imperative that the State has a consistent review and mechanism for rate setting to ensure that agencies can remain in business and deliver long-term care and supports to the citizens of Maine. If Bridges (just one of Maine's many agencies providing PSS, Adult Day, and Community Support services) were unable to continue providing care to its consumers, over 250 Mainers and 15,000 hours of monthly care would go unserved. LD1573 provides for a rebasing requirement to set and increase reimbursement rates every two years and must also account for increased costs to providers. If MaineCare reimbursement rates are structured to keep pace with the economy, providers will be able to provide care to consumers and their families, caregivers will receive needed respite, and our direct care workforce will have meaningful employment caring for those we serve.

This bill also establishes a Long-term Care Workforce Oversight Committee. It is increasingly more vital that the State understand the needs of the direct care workforce, and identify real, lasting solutions to support employment growth in this sector. With the need for services growing, we must cultivate the workforce that will provide this necessary care. Bridges provides its commitment to assist this Commission in their efforts.

I strongly encourage Mainers to vocalize their support of LD1537 to their representatives and senators, and urge this Committee to pass this bill.

Thank you for your time.