

Good morning, Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and support of LD 1573, an act to implement the recommendations of the commission to study long-term care workforce issues. My name is Sra Malone, I work for Community Living Association in Houlton Maine. I've worked as a DSP for 25 years. I love the work I do, but I have had many times in my career where I have struggled to make ends meet. In the past few years our staffing has gotten worse. Enough so that on many occasions I've had to work alone with 4 or 5 people for long periods of time. During the pandemic we've been short staffed more than ever. We have more openings now at CLA than any time I can remember. Turnover is high because many of the other places in town such as retail or some of the fast-food places are able to pay more than us. This is despite all the varied responsibilities of being a DSP. Things such as having to give critical medications, do ALL types of personal care, deal with difficult (sometimes even violent) behaviors, be a cook, housekeeper, and friend to the people we serve. In the past year I've had to keep everyone including myself and my family safe during a pandemic. As you all know this isn't easy, especially doing it in a congregate housing setting. We had an outbreak at the home that I work at and it hurts me to say we had somebody pass away from COVID-19. We also had more than one staff come down with COVID-19. This was (and still is) a very stressful time and we had many staff leave that we haven't been able to replace. All the turnover we have hurts the continuity of care for the people we serve. This can cause behaviors and anxiety. I know it also makes it very hard on the parents of our clients. I've had many of them mention this to me over the years. They would like to see some consistency with the people working with their loved ones. I'm not saying that turnover doesn't happen everywhere, but it seems to be very very high in our field and it seems to have gotten nothing but worse. From what I've been told the state says this is a minimum wage job, it's not. For all the reasons I stated above and many more reasons, it's just not. Please allow caregivers to be paid a livable wage so we can make ends meet without having to work 50+ hours a week.

Sincerely,
Sra Smith
Direct Support Professional,
Community Living Association
Houlton Maine