

Good morning, 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 **Leah Marie McAlpine**, I am a Direct Support *PROFESSIONAL*, and I have been in this field for 28 years at the same agency. I have made this my career, despite having a degree in Special Education where I could make more money, working fewer hours a day and have summers off. The work I do is just as important and *professional* as Special Education Teachers and Education Technicians, but we are not considered by Maine as *professionals* – we deserve to be paid at a *professional* rate. Increasing wages will attract more highly qualified people, like myself to mentor and lead the employees who come and try to do this work without any experience in this ESSENTIAL field of work.

There is an intense amount of training and knowledge required to do this job, it is not like fast food or retail stores – we are taking care of human lives...shouldn't there be a difference in how we get paid? We are required to maintain *professional* certifications in order to stay at work, we should be paid as *professionals*.

Since people can make the same money doing easier work, we have a very high turnover rate and we are at an all-time crisis level of job openings. Over 70 full time employees are needed to fill all the openings we currently have. That means the rest of us are working extremely long hours and days and many spend more time at work than at home. This job is not like retail and restaurant jobs...those businesses close at night and people get to go home and rejuvenate for the next day. *Increasing the DSP wages will encourage more highly qualified people to consider changing their lifestyle to do the work we do*. Increasing the DSP wages will help people AFFORD to be away from their families for so long each day and each week.

Over the years I have worked mega amounts of over-time due to being so short staffed. This impacted my family life and my quality of life. I had to cut back to 60 hours because it was taking such a toll on my personal life (or lack there of). I see DSP burn-out because people get into this field for the right reasons, they want to help people and make a difference, but then when they get asked every week or every day to work extra – people lose hope that there is ever going to be relief in the DSP worker shortage. Increasing the DSP wages will help decrease staff burn-out, and staff turn-over.

I urge you to support this crucial, ESSENTIAL, *profession* and pass the law that would commit to studying the need to increase DSP wage to be above minimum wage for average entry level jobs.

If you have more time, I will gladly talk at length about how important having consistent staffing is to the PEOPLE I support to live meaningful lives in their Maine communities. I can be reached at 207.478.2349 or [lmcalpine@ohimaine.org](mailto:lmcalpine@ohimaine.org)

Leah McAlpine

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I live in Glenburn, Maine