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May 3, 2021

Re: LD 1573 An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Cullen Ryan, and I am the Executive Director of Community Housing of Maine or CHOM, the largest supportive housing provider for homeless populations in Maine. Our staff of 11 works collaboratively with more than 50 different service provider organizations to effectively and efficiently house some 1100 of Maine's most vulnerable people, including more than 100 people with intellectual/developmental disabilities (ID/DD). I am also a parent of a 24-year-old son with ID/DD. In addition to being a parent, I serve as Chair of the Maine Coalition for Housing and Quality Services, a coalition of some 4000 people, consisting primarily of parents, that focuses on housing and quality services for people with ID/DD. Ultimately, the goal of the Coalition is to create a system of quality housing and personal supports that is person and family centered, with choice, dignity, and efficiency being at the forefront of efforts. I also serve as chair the Maine Developmental Services Oversight and Advisory Board (MDSOAB) Board.

I am testifying today in support of LD 1573, which would implement recommendations from the Commission to Study Long-term Care Workforce issues. Specifically, this bill would increase rates for home and community-based services (HCBS), ensuring that direct support professionals (DSPs) are paid no less than 125% of minimum wage. The bill would also establish the Long-term Care Workforce Oversight Advisory Committee, which would collect, review, and analyze data pertaining to Maine's workforce shortage as well as services provided to clients, and report back to the Legislature.

I urge the Committee to support any bill, including LD 1573, which would increase the rates for HCBS, specifically rates for direct support professionals (DSPs).

The reduced rates over the past decade have made it progressively harder for providers to hire and retain direct care staff, or DSPs, the people who work with my son and others with intellectual/developmental disabilities. DSPs are the very nexus of the system of care. Direct service professionals need to be paid enough to want to work in the field to begin with, and to stay in the field once they've begun their careers. If agencies can't hire anyone, if agencies can't retain anyone, people like my son won't receive services.

And, providers need to be able to keep their doors open while paying a wage high enough to accomplish this. The current rates, though improved in recent years, are not yet sustainable for providers to succeed in hiring and retaining staff, which has worsened amid the pandemic. This ultimately hurts the recipients of needed services. Despite the great need, agencies can only lose money for so long before it becomes completely untenable to provide services. The situation has become dire for providers across the state, especially amid the pandemic. The Administration and the Legislature have worked to remedy this in this Legislative Session, but more work remains.

This bill would ensure that people in Maine with ID/DD have access to quality, continuous, essential support services.

Establishing the Long-term Care Workforce Oversight Advisory Committee is also critical, as it will allow data pertaining to Maine's workforce shortage and related support service delivery system to be continuously gathered and analyzed. This will provide an avenue for continuous improvement of the continuum of care for people with ID/DD in Maine. The bill as written, includes a total of ten (10) members, and details membership as being eight (8) members appointed by the commission



who are employers and providers of long-term care services, a member appointed by the commissioner who self-directs services, and the long-term care ombudsperson. I believe this is a broad group of people who will be able to offer key insight into Maine's workforce crisis. However, I would implore the Committee to consider having the membership of this advisory committee include a representative of Maine's Developmental Services Oversight and Advisory Board (MDSOAB). The MDSOAB is a statutorily-created board with oversight over DHHS' developmental services, inclusive of Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS). I believe specifically including a member of the MDSOAB within the established membership of the Long-term Care Workforce Oversight Advisory Committee makes good sense, will reduce duplication of efforts, improve information sharing, and importantly continue to eliminate silos that exist within the system of care.

I believe helping everyone reach their full potential is the way to go. I hope that you will invest in helping people with intellectual/development disabilities have access to and receive the services they need by supporting LD 1573.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.