

Testimony in Support of
LD 1718, An Act to Encourage Participation in Maine's Essential Support
Workforce Through Access to Higher Education

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Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business, my name is Laurie Belden, a resident of Durham and the Executive Director of the Home Care & Hospice Alliance of Maine (Alliance). The Alliance is a network of home health care, hospice, home care and personal care providers across our State delivering in-home care to older adults and disabled individuals of all ages, allowing them to stay in their home and community.

I'm here today to testify in opposition of **LD 1718, An Act to Encourage Participation in Maine's Essential Support Workforce Through Access to Higher Education.**

Workforce shortages remain one of the primary obstacles to ensuring access to long-term services and supports for older adults and individuals living with disabilities. High turnover rates (estimated between 40% and 60%) and increased demand for direct care services due to an aging population continue to exacerbate the shortage of direct care workers.¹

Home care essential support workers assist older adults and individuals of all ages with Activities of Daily Living (ADLs). ADLs include housekeeping, meal preparation, transferring/mobility; as well as more intimate care such as bathing, dressing and toileting. By supporting these basic health care needs, Maine's older adults and those with disabilities are able to stay in their home and community.

In February, the Maine Department of Health and Human Services released their Second Annual Report on "Efforts and Progress in Implementing the Recommendations of the Commission to Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues." This report indicates that one-third of MaineCare beneficiaries are only receiving partial or no care at all under Section 19 (Home and Community Benefits for the Elderly and Adults with Disabilities); and, even more alarming is the near fifty percent of Section 96 beneficiaries (Private Duty Nursing and Personal Care Services) receiving partial or no care at all.

The gap between the numbers of patients and families seeking assistance and the availability of workers to provide that care is accelerating at an unsustainable pace. **Essential support workers are the backbone of home and community-based services and the tuition grant program proposed in this bill would help to strengthen the pool of qualified, educated workers to meet the rising demand for services.**

Providing educational vouchers would help attract new workers into the caregiving field and could encourage current essential workers (often lower-wage workers) to access higher education for themselves and others in their family.

Maine has demonstrated the value of essential support workers through increased MaineCare reimbursement rates for compensation. Adding free higher education options is yet another positive step to entice and reward workers. Targeted initiatives, such as tuition vouchers, are imperative to close the gap of the thousands of hours of care undelivered to Mainers each week.

Please vote “ought not to pass” to help stabilize the essential care workforce and to ensure that home care remains a viable care option for Mainers.

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ⁱ National Conference of State Legislatures

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