



LD 1436, An Act to Protect Certain Essential Workers from Infectious Disease

April 30, 2021

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing Committee, my name is Laurie Belden. I am a resident of Durham and I serve as the executive director of the Home Care & Hospice Alliance of Maine -- a membership organization representing home care, home health care and hospice providers across the State. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in opposition of LD 1436 presented by Representative O'Connell.

Our network of members delivers essential care across our State to older adults and disabled individuals of all ages - allowing them to stay in their home and community. Annually, our provider members deliver care to more than 45,000 clients in their residences across Maine, traveling more than 20 million miles. Collectively, home care, home health care and hospice members employ more than 15,000 staff – a sector of the healthcare continuum contributing to Maine's economic growth and prosperity.

Despite being on the front lines of care during the COVID-19 emergency, Maine's home care, home health care and hospice caregivers were invisible when MEMA and the CDC prioritized the distribution of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Inadequate PPE in the home increased transmission risks for not only the home care worker and care recipient but also other household members and visitors – all faced a higher risk of contracting the virus. Generally, caregivers persevered and continued to provide care to their patients, feeling it was their duty to provide care during this time.

Our home care, home health care and hospice providers comply with state and federal rules dictating the use of adequate PPE when providing care in a residence. However, despite not being prioritized and denied access to the MEMA's supply of PPE provided by FEMA, our agencies do not have the financial capacity to absorb the cost of stockpiling PPE in preparation for a crisis. PPE expires and absorbing financial losses on products that are not reimbursed by MaineCare or other insurers would be detrimental for agencies already trying to survive on an ever-shrinking budget.

We would rather see our industry identified as an "essential health care provider" on the CDC's Public Health Preparedness Program and require MEMA and/or CDC to be responsible for Maine's stockpile of PPE. Our members would be happy to provide PPE burn rates so that the State can calculate adequate N95s, respirators, masks, gowns, eye protection and shoe coverings for a 3-month period when determining need for the entire health care delivery system. Home care, home health and hospice must have equitable access to the State's inventory during a public health emergency.

Respectfully, we urge the Committee to vote "no" and explore the option of improving the Public Health Preparedness Program to include home care, home health care and hospice as an essential health care provider; as well as to direct MEMA or CDC to manage a PPE stockpile for the State.

Thank you.

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