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To: Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing
From: Becky Smith, Dir. of Government and Community Relations
Re: Amendment to LD 898 An Act To Provide Incentives to Unemployed Workers To Become Part of the Caregiver Workforce
Date: January 31, 2022

Senator Daughtry, Representative Sylvester, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing, please accept this testimony in support of the sponsor’s amendment to LD 898, *An Act To Provide Incentives to Unemployed Workers To Become Part of the Caregiver Workforce*.

We commend Representative Fay for her unwavering support of Maine’s Essential Support Workers and for her recognition that Maine’s community colleges play an integral role in educating this workforce. The statutory definition of an Essential Support Worker is: “...an individual who by virtue of employment generally provides to individuals direct contact assistance with activities of daily living or instrumental activities of daily living or has direct access to provide care and services to clients, patients or residents regardless of the setting.”

Maine’s community colleges are an essential component of Maine’s health care, caregiver and public health infrastructure. Health care is our largest program area. We educate close to 2,000 students every year, studying to become nurses, LPNs, medical assistants, physical therapy assistants, respiratory therapists, phlebotomists, EMTs, substance use counselors, human and behavioral health practitioners, and medical office support staff. Each and every one of our colleges has multiple allied health programs.

In addition to our 1-year and 2-year degree and certificate programs, we offer a wide range of short-term career training that takes only a few weeks or months to complete – usually at no cost to the participant. The training is offered in partnership with employers around the state, on our campuses and online.

The Maine Community College System is known for its ability to quickly create curricula to meet specific workforce needs. As active members of the Essential Support Workforce Advisory Committee, we will be able to educate ourselves on the needs of both the workers and employers in the field and develop appropriate training programs if warranted. These programs would not only enhance the quality of care for Maine’s most vulnerable residents, but also provide essential support workers with the opportunity to pursue additional credentials and education if they choose.

Thank you for your time and attention, and we hope this committee will vote “Ought To Pass as Amended” on this important legislation.