



Maine Health Care Association

**TESTIMONY OF Angela Westhoff
President and CEO
Maine Health Care Association**

January 31, 2022, 1:00 pm

To the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing

In Support of LD 898

An Act to Create the Essential Support Workforce Advisory Committee

Good afternoon, Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester and members of the Committee. My name is Angela Westhoff and I serve as the President and CEO of the Maine Health Care Association (MHCA). We represent approximately 200 nursing homes and assisted living/ residential care facilities (also known as Private Non-Medical Institutions or PNMIs) all across the state. Our mission is to empower members to ensure the integrity, quality and sustainability of long term care in Maine. On behalf of our membership, I am pleased to provide testimony in support of LD 898.

This initiative is derived from many months of work and attention by those who served on the Commission to Study Long-Term Care Workforce Issues. In particular, we thank Representative Fay for her consistent support and leadership to address Maine's direct care workforce challenges. She has been a passionate advocate for our employees and we appreciate her work in this regard.

There is no question that direct care workers across the long term care continuum are critical to the health and well-being of Maine's elderly and disabled citizens. Over the years, we've referred to these employees as the lifeline, the backbone, the fabric of long term care – all

of these descriptions are accurate. Today, we face a disconcerting risk to the sustainability of this fabric, as we see unprecedented staffing shortages in long term care that have only worsened due to the pandemic. Members consistently cite staffing as one of their biggest challenges. A recent MHCA survey shows 85% of members are very concerned about staffing or have reached crisis level with numerous openings. There are high turnover rates and on average, 49% of respondents have 1-10 open positions, another 19% have 21 or more open positions. As a result, facilities have been forced to limit admissions or rely on agency staff more than they'd like.

We are pleased to support the creation of this Advisory Commission. As you consider additional recommendations in the future, it will be important to have the appropriate voices at the table. The Commission membership proposed in this bill represents a diverse, well-balanced group of experts. We've taken important first steps by raising wages and aligning corresponding provider rates, defining career paths, and planning public awareness campaigns. Looking ahead, we know it will take a sustained and concentrated effort to address the problems that have led to the shortages. It's going to take short-, medium- and long-term strategies and we believe this Commission will be a resource to you, the Department, and providers as we move forward together in this work. We are pleased to support LD 898 today and thank you for the opportunity to comment.