

betsy sawyer-manter
SeniorsPlus
LD 898

Testimony in Support of LD 898
An Act to Create the Essential Workforce Advisory Committee

Good day, Senator Daughtry, Representative Sylvester and members of the Labor and Housing Committee. My name is Betsy Sawyer-Manter. I am the CEO of SeniorsPlus, one of the five Agencies on Aging in the state serving Androscoggin, Franklin, and Oxford counties. SeniorsPlus is also a large statewide provider of care coordination for those seeking to remain in their homes. The goal of SeniorsPlus is to assist older and disabled people to age well so that they are able to stay at home, independently, as long as possible.

I am providing written testimony in support of LD 898 – An Act to Create the Essential Workforce Advisory Committee.

As a result of the work of previous legislatures there are many initiatives in the works to develop, grow and retain a more robust direct care (essential) workforce here in Maine. I applaud all the efforts that are underway as they appear to be very comprehensive in terms of achieving the goals of growth and retention. As a member of the The Commission to Study Long Term Care Workforce Issues, I was encouraged to see so many of the ideas adopted and moved forward by the legislature, as well as DHHS and DOL.

As one of Maine's key Service Coordination Agencies, we are continuously looking for direct care staffing for over 4000 older and disabled adults. In any given week, we have an average of 10,000 hours of authorized staffing uncovered due to the lack of people in the direct care (essential) workforce. These services are for people who have been found eligible for one of the 3 programs that we work in; Section 19 and 96 of MaineCare and Section 63, Home Based Care, a state funded program. Many of the people we seek staffing for are nursing home level of care who want and can stay at home safely in the community with adequate staffing support with activities of daily living. If we have an average of 10,000 hours unstaffed, I cannot imagine the number of hours there are across all programs.

The initiatives that have been outlined are good. However, the pace of rolling them out has been slow and has not resulted in any change in the workforce and the ability to attract and retain workers has not improved. I support the creation of a workforce advisory committee that reports to the legislature. As outlined, it is a comprehensive array of key stakeholders who each brings a perspective that is helpful to insure that we are all working together to impact a difficult and challenging economic period. Maine's population is not shifting away from the impact of aging. We will all be impacted by the need for a well-staffed and quality long term services and support system. This advisory committee will insure we keep the momentum that we have begun to build.

Thank you for reviewing my testimony. I can be reached at 207-513-3701 or bsawyer-manter@seniorsplus.org if I may be of any further assistance.

Respectfully Submitted,
Betsy Sawyer-Manter
President and CEO
SeniorsPlus
8 Falcon Road
Lewiston, Maine 04240