

# If not now, when will we invest in Maine's Essential Support Workforce?

**We urge you to fully fund LD 1573 *An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Commission To Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues in the FY22/23 Biennial Budget***

It's time to value and invest in the tens of thousands of Maine workers who provide vital daily supports and services to older people, people with physical, intellectual, and developmental disabilities, and people with behavioral health challenges, to ensure they thrive in their homes and community settings.

With a healthy state surplus and nearly a billion dollars coming to Maine through the American Rescue Plan Act, **the time is now** to raise MaineCare and state-funded rates to stabilize and grow Maine's Essential Support Workforce across all populations and in all settings. This is good for our economy, and ensures thousands of people and their families can get the support they need now. **These Mainers can't wait for the new rate system to be implemented, which will take years.**

**The Health & Human Services Committee voted unanimously to pass LD 1573 which will:**

- Identify "essential support workers" across all populations and settings
- Require the wage portion of the MaineCare/state-funded rate be set at 125% of minimum wage
- Require rates to include reimbursement for unfunded mandates
- Adjust for COLA every 2 years, and rebase every 5 years

## **OUTDATED RATES ARE COMPOUNDING THE WORKFORCE CRISIS**

- **Providers are employing all of the staff they can** at the wages they can pay based on the rates the State pays for these services. The only way to increase the number of workers is to increase rates that would offer competitive wages in this tight labor market. Unless we act now, this workforce will decline, leaving thousands more Mainers without support.
- 70% of Maine's Long Term Care Providers rely on MaineCare; for home care providers who take MaineCare, 75-95% of their members are MaineCare members.
- The wage rate component for several MaineCare rates are below the current minimum wage. **The wage rate component for Section 21 Group Home Intellectual Disabilities Residential Services is \$11.21 an hour.** Planned state increases for FY22 will only bring this wage rate up to \$12.15. Across all providers, including nursing homes, current wages for essential care workers range between \$12.15 and \$15.50 an hour, except in urban areas where a few providers are paying more to try to compete. These wages will not attract new workers.

## **COVID HAS DEEPENED THE CRISIS. STAFF LEVELS CONTINUE TO DECLINE.**

- The current workforce is running on fumes, and discouraged and exhausted staff are leaving for higher paying and lower risk positions.
- IDD service providers report a loss of more than 16% of their workforce over the last year.
- The Homemaker Program saw staff decline from 120 to 90 during COVID.
- According to the Maine Health Care Association, so far in 2021, the turnover rate for CNA positions is 60%, and for Personal Support Specialist (PSS) positions it is 74%. Turnover was higher in both settings when compared to 2020.
- Mental Health agencies are seeing turnover rates of 50% for direct care staff. Vacancies can last for upwards of a year, with 10 months as the average to fill positions.
- Providers throughout the state report not being able to hire a new worker in over a month.

## THOUSANDS OF MAINERS ARE WAITING FOR OR GOING WITHOUT SERVICES

- Each week, more than 10,000 hours of approved home care goes undelivered to more than 800 nursing-home-eligible older Mainers because of our workforce shortage. *The number of unstaffed hours has doubled in the last five years.*
- There are currently 1,114 older Mainers on the Homemaker Program (Independent Support Services) waitlist, and 240 current consumers have no staffing.
- There are nearly 1,000 older people and people with disabilities waiting to receive home support services under Section 63 and Chapter 11.
- There are 2000 people with intellectual disabilities on waitlists for Section 21 and 29. They are eligible for services but can't access essential care because the Program can't hire enough staff.
- There are over 600 children on waitlists for Section 65 Home and Community Treatment.
- Residential treatment and long-term care providers must increasingly turn down new admissions due to insufficient staff. Empty beds erode their financial viability which will most certainly lead to more facility closures – despite high demand for their services.

## THE CONSEQUENCES ARE BAD FOR US ALL

- Mainers who might otherwise be able to live independently at home, are leaving their friends and families to live in facilities, sometimes far away from their loved ones.
- Otherwise productive workers who are disabled are having to leave the workforce.
- Productive members of our workforce are leaving jobs to take care of relatives, harming their own financial security, and our economy.
- Hospital beds are being used unnecessarily to house people who cannot be discharged to home or to care settings because of staffing shortages.
- It's devastating for workers and the local economy when good employers fail, yet many home care, behavioral health agencies, and nursing homes have closed over the last 5 years.
- Over the last several months, providers who support people with intellectual disabilities and with behavioral health challenges have begun to collapse services and close dozens of group homes because they don't have the staff to provide the basic level of support needed to keep them in place.

**If not now, when? We must fully fund LD 1573!**

