

If not now, when?

June 2, 2021

President Jackson, Speaker Fecteau, and Esteemed Members of the Maine House & Senate:

We, the undersigned Maine organizations, are writing to urge you to pass and fully fund LD 1573, a bill that received unanimous support from the Health & Human Services Committee, and is critical to solving Maine's severe and worsening Essential Support Worker shortages. We are concerned that older people, people of all ages living with physical, intellectual, or developmental disabilities, and those with behavioral health challenges, are not getting the support they need.

Increasingly, lawmakers understand that the health of our economy requires investments in supports for both kids *and* adults - for kids' parents, who are our workers; for their grandparents, who are still our workers - and even their great grandparents. We need to invest in the workforce that provides supports for all people, of all ages, to ensure our workforce and economy remain strong.

For decades we've been pushing for investments in quality child care, and for good reason! Workers need access to quality, affordable child care to remain in the workforce. With Maine's shrinking labor pool, it's critical that every available worker remains active in our workforce. That's why employers like L.L. Bean, state officials, and President Biden, understand we must invest in quality long term care and long term supports and services, as well as in child care.

Unfortunately, Maine's essential support workforce is running on fumes. Underpaid, discouraged, and exhausted workers are leaving this workforce for higher paying, less stressful jobs. Providers are employing all of the workers they can at the wages they can pay based on current MaineCare rates. With turn-over rates between 50% and 70%, these providers are finding it increasingly difficult to hire replacement workers. Unless we increase MaineCare and state-funded rates to allow providers to pay closer to a competitive wage for workers, people will go without the supports they need, and our waitlists will continue to grow. These Mainers, many of whom are going without any support right now, can't wait for the new rate system to be implemented, which will take years.

LD 1573 is a critical first step in rebuilding Maine's crumbling essential support workforce. It values essential support workers for the role they play in the health of our economy and people by improving pay for all workers at once. It will help providers to be able to compete for workers in this tight labor market. It will create thousands of good paying jobs, narrow gender and racial pay gaps, and expand overall household income in Maine.

So, we have to ask, if not now, when? We have a significant state surplus and hundreds of millions of dollars from the American Rescue Plan Act. The report of the Commission to Study Long Term Care Workforce Issues gives a roadmap to how we can grow our essential support workforce, and LD 1573 implements the most important recommendation – increasing reimbursement rates for workers. ***We urge you to read the attached fact sheet, and then act to fully fund LD 1573.***

We urge you to consider all funding options. While we don't need another commission to study the problem, we might need a Commission to Study and Recommend Funding Solutions to Maine's Growing Essential Support Workforce Shortage. However, increased rates cannot wait for a Commission study, so something must be done right now to increase pay for these workers.

The 100+ organizations included in this letter urge action now. If not now, when? Thank you.



3i Housing of Maine
 AARP Maine
 Alliance Maine
 Alpha One
 Alternative Services NE, Inc
 Alzheimer's Association, Maine Chapter
 Amicus
 Amicus-PVI/RLE
 Aroostook Agency on Aging
 Assistance Plus
 Autism Society of Maine
 Avesta Housing
 BCBA4Hire.com
 Behavioral Health Community Collaborative
 Care & Comfort
 Caring Hands, LLC
 Casa, Inc
 Catholic Charities Maine
 Central Aroostook Association
 Coastal Opportunities
 Community Connect Maine
 Community Housing of Maine
 Community Living Association (CLA)
 Consumers for Affordable Health Care
 Creative Works
 Crisis and Counseling Centers
 Downeast Horizons
 Elder Abuse Institute of Maine
 Elmhurst
 Fernow Medical Associates
 Gallant Therapy Services

Generations, LLC
 Goodwill Industries of Northern New England
 Great Bay Services, Inc.
 Green Valley Association
 Group Main Stream (GMS)
 Harpswell Aging at Home
 Helping Hands with Heart/Maine Highlands
 Investment Partnership
 Home Care & Hospice Alliance of Maine
 Hope Association
 Independence Advocates of Maine
 Independence Association
 ISC for ME, LLC
 John F. Murphy Homes, Inc.
 Kennebec Behavioral Health
 KidsPeace
 LeadingAge Maine & New Hampshire
 LEAP, Inc.
 Legal Services for the Elderly
 Lighthouse Elder Care, Inc. dba Home Instead
 Living Innovations
 Maine Association for Community Service Providers
 Maine Center for Economic Policy
 Maine Community Action Partnership
 Maine Council of Churches
 Maine Council on Aging

Maine Equal Justice
 Maine Health Care Association
 Maine Home Care
 Maine Long Term Care Ombudsman Program
 Maine People's Alliance
 Maine Public Health Association
 Maine Veterans' Homes
 Maine Vocational & Rehabilitation Associates, Inc.
 Maine Women's Lobby
 Mobius, Incorporated
 Momentum
 Mount Desert Nursing Association
 Natural Health By Celeste
 New Communities, Inc.
 NFI North
 North Country Associates
 Northern Aroostook Alternatives, Inc.
 Northern Maine General
 OHI Maine
 Opportunity Enterprises, Inc.
 Oxford County Mental Health Services
 PCS Family Homes
 Penquis
 Personal Onsite Development
 Piper Shores

Port Resources PSL
 Services /STRIVE
 Residential Resources
 Safer Healthcare, LLC
 Saint Joseph's College of Maine
 SeniorsPlus
 SequelCare of Maine
 Shalom House, Inc.
 SKILLS, Inc.
 Spectrum Generations
 Spurwink
 St. Joseph's Rehabilitation & Residence
 Sweetser
 The Cedars
 The Opportunity Alliance
 The Park Danforth
 The Pines Senior Communities
 The Progress Center
 Tri-County Mental Health Services
 UCP of Maine
 Uplift, Inc.
 Volunteers of America
 Northern New England
 Waban Projects, Inc.
 Waldo Community Action Partners
 Woodfords Family Services
 Work First Inc.