



**Written Testimony of Jess Maurer on Behalf of  
The Maine Council on Aging  
To Joint Standing Committee on Health & Human Services**

**In Favor of LD 653 - Resolve, To Establish the Task Force  
To Study Opportunities for Improving Home and  
Community-based Services**

Submitted in Writing on February 25, 2019

Senator Gratwick, Representative Hymanson and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Jess Maurer and I'm the Executive Director of the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of more than 75 organizations, businesses and older community members working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age at home and in community settings. I am submitting testimony in favor of LD 653, a bill that establishes a Task Force to study opportunities to improve Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) in Maine.

While Maine's older adults are as diverse as our geography, they almost all agree on one thing – they want to age in place, remaining in their homes for as long as possible. To successfully age in place, older adults may need access to supports and services that help them with meeting daily needs. This can be help with getting out of bed, showering and dressing or help shopping, cleaning and preparing food. Personal support service workers, known as direct care workers, are the backbone of the paid home-based care system that provide these services.

Unfortunately, the system that provides HCBS to older adults in Maine is in crisis. This is because we have a retiring workforce, a shrinking working-age population, and a failed approach to long term care funding. For nearly two decades, MaineCare reimbursement rates to providers were artificially low, forcing providers to pay lower-than-market wages to direct care workers. While the 127<sup>th</sup> and 128<sup>th</sup> Legislatures made gains in better funding HCBS, this funding does not go far enough to solve the workforce shortage. This is because Maine is now at full employment and our significant worker shortage means low-wage earners can find less challenging work than direct care for higher wages and with benefits.

This is what the direct care crisis within the HCBS looks like - this week and every week for more than three years, about 6,000 hours of approved care under the MaineCare waiver go

unstaffed, not because payment hasn't been authorized, but because home care providers cannot maintain an adequate staff to meet demand.

Even for-profit home care agencies that do not serve the MaineCare population are finding it increasingly difficult to attract and retain qualified workers. They are having to increase prices to provide correspondingly higher wages to compete for workers, leaving older people who cannot afford to pay without any access to the care they need.

Accessibility and affordability of home care services will be the deciding factor for thousands of Mainers who want to continue to live at home as they age. Consider that 25% of people over 65 are projected to need more than one year of paid support over the remainder of their lifetime. About 75,000 Mainers age 65+ are living in "the gap" – meaning they do not have enough income to meet their basic expenses but don't qualify for any means-tested benefits. Maine ranks in the bottom quarter of all states nationally for affordability and access for LTSS and the costs of long term support services exceeds the budgets of most Maine households.

In order to ensure accessibility and affordability of home care services, we must understand the current unmet demand for services. We must understand how eligibility levels impact the ability of people to gain access to the services they need. We must explore ways that people who cannot afford the help they need can gain access to it at a price they can afford. LD 653 proposes to create a Task Force charged with exploring solutions to these challenges.

I stood before you last week in support of LD 583, an act requiring the Department to engage in a broad study of Maine's long term supports and services system (LTSS), including funding opportunities, eligibility requirements and emerging needs. While LD 653 proposes to elevate the discussion of one part of Maine's LTSS system, HCBS, to the level of a Task Force, the types of inquiry, data and analysis proposed in this bill will be the kind of work the Department will have to do for each available LTSS service under LD 583. I see these bills working in partnership – LD 583 creates a broad mandate for the Department to study demand, funding, access and affordability across the entire LTSS continuum. LD 653 creates a stakeholder process to guide and inform a part of that study.

The current inability of older Mainers, regardless of payer source, to access the home care services they need not only threatens their ability to age at home, it puts thousands of older Mainers at daily risk of avoidable health problems, increased hospitalizations and early entry into facility-based long term care. The time to act is now.

Thank you.

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