



**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 886 – Resolve, To Encourage Employment
in the Direct Care Workforce**

Delivered in Person on April 23, 2021

Senator Hickman, Representative Sylvester and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing:

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 100 organizations, businesses, municipalities, 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. We are in support of LD 886.

The MCOA proposed legislation to create the Commission to Study Long Term Care Workforce Issues in December 2016, after a significant stakeholder process identified a multitude of ways in which Maine needed to systematically address its severe and pervasive direct care workforce shortage. Notably, one of the ways identified in the 2016 stakeholder process was to actively promote direct care workers as vital to our economy, working caregivers, and older and disabled people who continue to contribute to society in a multitude of ways. While the Commission was initially created pursuant to LD 925, enacted in July of 2018, the Commission failed to meet before the end of the session, and needed to be re-authorized in 2019.

In December 2019, 3 full years after we started this journey, the Commission issued its recommendations, one of which you are considering today. I offer this history because we understood that the crisis was looming five years ago, and had hoped to make progress in averting it starting in 2017. Remarkably, COVID hit in 2020, and we had to yet again postpone this critical conversation about promoting the direct care workforce. However, there can be no doubt that the COVID crisis has made it even more important to invest in promoting and building a quality essential care workforce ready to meet Maine's care needs.

By 2025, over a quarter of Maine's population is expected to be age 65 and older. In 2019, the Department of Health and Human Service determined that between 52% and 70% of people

turning 65 would eventually need some form of assistance with their activities of daily living.¹ 25% of people turning age 65 now are projected to need more than one year of paid support over the remainder of their lifetime. To be abundantly clear, unless we act now, most of the people who will need care will not be able to find the care they need. Consider where we are now.

Each week, there are thousands of unstaffed hours of care for Maine's most vulnerable older and disabled Mainers. In any given week, about 10,000 hours of approved care by Personal Support Specialists go undelivered to about 850 people, including more than 500 older Mainers who received no staffing at all. Most of these people are nursing home eligible.

There are over 1,000 people waiting to access the Homemaker program. In addition, out of 1,650 current Homemaker clients, 250 clients have no staffing at all. Due to COVID and other factors, the program has dropped from 120 workers into the 90's.

There are empty beds in nursing homes and assisted living facilities due to staffing shortages, while we warehouse older people in hospitals who cannot be discharged to home or to a facility.

Right now, over 6 of every 7 direct care workers are women, and many are older.² Many of these older workers left the profession when COVID hit. COVID has taken an enormous emotional toll on care workers in nursing homes; many have left, or plan on leaving after the health crisis is over. There is also a sense among home care workers, who could not get protective gear, and who were never prioritized for vaccination, that they are undervalued, leading to a significant moral problem in the home care profession.

LD 886 will not solve all these problems, but it implements one of the critical recommendations from the Commission's Report. There are other Commission recommendations contained in other bills that will be coming before this and other Committees this session. Collectively, these bills will attempt to remedy the direct care workforce crisis more comprehensively.

LD 886 is a simple, but critical strategy that the Commission determined should be an immediate action item. A key component to addressing the direct care workforce shortage is attracting more workers and elevating the importance of the work to society. The Commission noted that the need to attract additional workers including new residents, racial and ethnic minority community members, men, younger people, older people, and people with disabilities is crucial.³ The goal of the multimedia public service campaign envisioned by LD 886 will be to attract people in these key demographic sectors to jobs in the direct care workforce. This campaign is more than a single public service announcement. It must be thoughtful, creative, and focused.

The campaign must emphasize that these jobs are valuable to our economy and that people in them are serving a critical role in society. We need to elevate these jobs to the level of first responders and help create a narrative about the honor of this profession. Many people with disabilities old and young need assistance with activities of daily living to get going in the

¹ <http://legislature.maine.gov/doc/3181>.

² [long-term-care-final.pdf](#)

³ [long-term-care-final.pdf](#)

morning, to get going to jobs, caring for grandkids, or volunteering to help others. These workers make it possible for others to be as productive as they can be, despite their need for care.

We urge you to vote in favor of LD 886.

Thank you.

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