



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

**In support of LD 949 –  
Resolve, To Restore the MaineCare Nursing Facility COVID-19  
Temporary Rate Increase**

**Delivered in writing on April 5, 2021**

Greetings Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health & Human Services:

My name is Jess Maurer. 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 Mainers working to make sure we can all live healthy, engaged, and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age in our homes and communities.

I am writing in support of LD 949 to restore the MaineCare Nursing Facility COVID-19 Temporary Rate Increase because nursing facilities have been especially hard hit in this pandemic, and the need that prompted the temporary increase is still very present.

This temporary rate increase was intended to help Nursing Facilities with the significant financial challenges brought on by the pandemic. However, as the pandemic raged on, the temporary rate increase ended in June. While there have been higher payments allowed during outbreaks, no additional funding has been allocated to support these critical care facilities as they struggle to maintain staffing, address increased socialization and care needs of residents, grapple with increased infection control, manage the emotional toll this virus has caused.

As this Committee knows all too well, providers across the continuum of care were besieged with problems related to staffing long before the pandemic hit. Consider in the fall of 2019, just before the pandemic, a survey conducted by long term care facilities in Maine had found that 60% of them had declined an admission in the previous 90 days due to staffing shortages.

The COVID -19 outbreak has significantly exacerbated the situation, particularly as it relates to facility care workers, and threatens this segment of providers as a whole. Workforce shortages, inadequate wages, and limited upward mobility for frontline workers have all become more pronounced while these same workers face the risk of exposure to COVID-19 each time they go to work. Staffing costs in facilities have skyrocketed, driven by competition for workers, overtime costs, and agency staffing, to account for workers who were out due to the virus.

While rate increases passed by the legislature for home care workers was a step in the right

direction, these increases were not sufficient to make wages competitive with other sectors, and were not made available to essential care workers in long term care settings.

The number of COVID-19 infections and deaths in nursing facilities across the country and in Maine have been staggering. Nationally, while only 1% of the population lives in nursing facilities, 34% of all COVID deaths have occurred with residents of these facilities. In Maine, it's closer to 50%. The efforts Maine's nursing home staff have made to keep residents safe in the face of unrelenting challenges have been heroic. The staff have endured a year of stress, fear and grief many of us cannot imagine. Too many care workers in these facilities are deciding to change careers, leaving facilities scrambling constantly to hire new staff, or pay for agency staff until new staff can be found.

This pandemic is far from over. The impact of this pandemic on our care infrastructure and frontline essential care staff will not be fully understood for years. Reinstating the temporary COVID-19 rate increase for the remainder of the pandemic is necessary to help to maintain adequate staffing for nursing facility residents and allow nursing facilities to continue to operate, particularly in rural areas.

We urge a vote in support of LD 949.

Thank you.

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