**Testimony of Jess Maurer on Behalf of
the Maine Council on Aging to the Committee on
Health and Human Services**

In Favor of LD 1037 - An Act to Fund Competitive
Wages for Direct Support Professionals for Persons
with Disabilities

Delivered in person on April 20, 2023

Greetings, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and the members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services.

My name is Jess Maurer, and I am the Executive Director at the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of 135 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. I am testifying in favor of LD 1037.

For nearly a decade, legislators have struggled to find solutions to Maine's severe and pervasive essential support and care workforce shortage. You have created commissions, raised wages, established COLAs, reduced waitlists, and created a marketing campaign and an oversight committee. The Departments of Health & Human Services (DHHS) and Labor have done so much to grow this workforce too, from training and job fairs, sign-on and retention bonuses, to career ladders and navigation, they've done it all and much more.

While we have made real progress in valuing this workforce, a recent report from DHHS demonstrates that all of these efforts have only stabilized this workforce, not addressed the growing gap in care that goes undelivered to thousands of vulnerable people who are entitled to receive this care.[1]

We are at a critical point in trying to solve this workforce shortage. We need to invest more resources to grow and sustain a larger workforce. LD 1037 proposes to do just that. However, we don't know how many workers we need to attract to these jobs to fill the care gap, nor what we'll need to pay them to compete with other industries. Is 157% above minimum wage the right place to set the labor portion of the MaineCare rates? We don't know.

Without more data, we continue to guess at what kind of investment is needed to grow this workforce. Without understanding the number of workers needed to fill the hours of approved care and the waitlists, we will not know how much money to allocate to the problem.

If the Legislature is prepared to appropriate sufficient funds to enact LD 1037, we are fully in favor. However, we offer this support knowing we might need to come back again, when we have the data we need to fully understand what solutions are needed, to ask for additional funding.

Thank you.

---

[1] https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/inline-files/AAAA-Annual-Report-February-2023.pdf