



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

**In Favor of LD 1521 - An Act to Support the
Essential Support Workforce by Promoting Enhanced
Reimbursement and Benefits and Encouraging
Information Sharing**

Delivered on April 20, 2023

Greetings, 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 over 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 1521.

Maine's essential direct care and support workforce provides invaluable services to older citizens, people with intellectual and physical disabilities, and people with behavioral health challenges. These care and support services allow the folks who need assistance access to autonomy, dignity, and choice. Beyond that, the care and support these workers provide can literally make a difference in someone's ability to remain housed, or safe from prolonged hospital stays, or alive.

According to PHI's data on Maine's direct care workforce, there are just under 25,000 workers across this state providing care and support services; 87% of those works are women, 10% are people of color, and 6% are comprised of New Mainers – but most importantly, there currently are not enough of them to ensure all Mainers who need care receive it.¹

Despite numerous and necessary efforts to bolster this workforce – including raising reimbursement rates to 125% of minimum wage, COLAs, and ardent recruitment efforts – it has only stabilized, and as Mainers grapple with a worker shortage, workers struggle to meet their basic needs as these jobs are historically egregiously underpaid with few benefits meaning many workers live at or below the Federal Poverty Level and require public assistance.

The efforts outlined in LD 1521 will provide needed supports for those who support us. By standardizing mileage reimbursement and examining the feasibility of a benefits system for workers while also making these workers more accessible to the people who need them via the development of a publicly available worker registry.

¹ (PHI National, 2023)

Given all of the efforts currently underway to correct these workforce challenges without significant improvement in the crisis, we must dedicate all reasonable efforts to establishing real-time solutions and those solutions must focus on both the worker and the individual needing care and support. In addition to drawing workers into the field and creating the necessary incentives to help them remain working, we are obligated to ensure that the means of accessing those workers is as easy and straightforward as possible. The solutions offered in LD 1521 allow both of those priorities to be actualized.

There is a path forward where timely, ingenious solutions will ensure all Mainers who need care and support receive it from a valued and quality direct care workforce, but it will require our investment before we will see the changes Maine needs. We urge you to support LD 1521 as it represents just one of those solutions.

Thank you. I am happy to answer any questions.

Jena Jones