



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, January 20, 2026

### CONTACTS

Karin Leuthy (Maine Center for Economic Policy) | 207-620-1127 | [karin@mecep.org](mailto:karin@mecep.org)

Victoria Foley (Fecteau) | 207-409-5115 | [victoria.foley@legislature.maine.gov](mailto:victoria.foley@legislature.maine.gov)

John Bott (Poirier) | 207-287-1440 | [john.bott@legislature.maine.gov](mailto:john.bott@legislature.maine.gov)

### **Lawmakers Voice Bipartisan Support for Maine's Essential Care & Support Workforce**

*Speaker Ryan Fecteau (D-Biddeford), Rep. Jennifer Poirier (R-Skowhegan) highlight importance of essential support professionals*

**AUGUSTA, ME** — In a press conference held today, lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, direct care and support workers, and advocates called on state lawmakers to increase reimbursement rates for direct care and support services to boost wages and strengthen the essential care and support workforce.

“Direct care is physically and emotionally tolling work, but it is also critical. These workers need to be paid what they deserve,” **said Speaker Ryan Fecteau (D-Biddeford)**. “When tens of thousands of authorized home care hours go unfilled every week due to staffing shortages, we fail both our seniors and disabled Mainers, as well as the workers themselves. We must increase wages and grow the workforce in order to close the care gap.”

"I am proud to support efforts that reinforce our commitment to supporting Maine's most vulnerable residents," **said Representative Jennifer Poirier (R-Skowhegan)**. "This is not only about workforce development and retention — it's about making sure individuals have the care and support they need to live their best lives. This bill will help secure the direct care workforce we need to stabilize and build vital daily services so that individuals can continue to live with dignity, independence, and opportunity."

In 2021, lawmakers unanimously established a minimum reimbursement rate for direct care labor costs at 125% of the state minimum wage, adjusted annually for inflation. This landmark policy helped stabilize a workforce in crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Mills administration also implemented a rate review process to better align reimbursement with the real cost of care and bring predictability to the system.

LD 1932 builds on these improvements by adjusting reimbursement rates to support wage and benefit cost increases as the minimum wage rises each year, increasing reimbursement rates at 140% of the minimum wage for essential care and support workers. The bill also creates a critical wage floor for the sector. When MaineCare Direct Care Service rates are adjusted to support labor costs at 140% of minimum wage, MaineCare providers will be required to pay essential support workers providing reimbursed services 125% of the minimum wage. The bill also includes provisions to use technology to fill care gaps, develop consistent training programs for all care workers, improve oversight, and use data to improve efficiency.

Undervaluing care work results in significant public costs for the state. The direct care workforce shortage already keeps 8,000 Mainers out of the workforce and reduces our economic output by \$1 billion annually. In 2024, more than 23,000 hours of home care for older adults went unserved each week. Maine currently needs over 2,300 more full-time direct care professionals to meet growing demand. Keeping

wages and benefits flat will only exacerbate the shortage, strain hospitals and long-term care facilities, and further endanger public health.

Direct support professionals dedicate themselves to one of the most essential, demanding, and deeply rewarding roles in our state," **said Stephanie Hatcher, a direct support professional and trainer with more than three decades of experience.** "Many of my colleagues are forced to work two or even three jobs just to cover basic expenses. Recruitment and retention are a constant struggle. The people who suffer most are the individuals we support – people with disabilities who rely on a stable, caring workforce to meet their needs 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Direct care is essential work. Let's start treating it that way."

"It is not news that people of age and disabilities want to stay in their homes. Essential Support Workers are an integral part of this happening and will save thousands upon thousands of dollars from institutional living," **said Paul Armstrong, a Palermo resident.** Due to the shortage of essential support workers, Armstrong regularly goes without the home care support he qualifies for, sometimes going for as long as a month without services. "If there's a holiday, I do not get services. If my worker is sick or has time off, I do not get services. There is no such thing as a replacement worker nor make up time later in the week. If my worker can't show up, I get no services that week."

"Maine's care gap has widened into a chasm, leaving tens of thousands of Mainers without the care and support they need," **said Jess Maurer, Executive Director of the Maine Council on Aging.** "Speaker Fecteau's bill includes the bold steps needed to address Maine's care crisis, including critical investments in the workforce that will lead to stability and predictability in care."

###

For photos and video of the press conference, please contact Victoria Foley at the Speaker's office: 207-409-5115 | [victoria.foley@legislature.maine.gov](mailto:victoria.foley@legislature.maine.gov)

