

TESTIMONY OF Heidi Stratton, CNA  
Maine General Rehab and Long Term Care at Glenridge

Thursday May 23, 2019  
to the Joint Standing Committee on Health & Human Services

In Support of:  
***L.D. 1578 "An Act To Clarify and Amend MaineCare Reimbursement Provisions for  
Nursing and Residential Care Facilities"***

Good afternoon, Senator Gratwick, Representative Hymanson and members of the Committee. My name is Heidi Stratton and I am a Certified Nursing Assistant as well as a Resident Care Coordinator at Maine General Rehab and Long Term Care at Glenridge. I am here today to testify in support of L.D. 1578.

I am not a MaineCare reimbursement expert and this is a very technical bill, but the way I understand it, it will help facilities like mine better support our caregivers by making positive changes to how MaineCare reimburses my facility.

I have been a life-long resident of the Augusta area. I am here today to share with you the importance of caregiver wages and the effects that wages have on Maine's elderly in nursing facilities. I have been a CNA for over 20 years and can't imagine my life now without the residents in it.

When I was younger my grandfather was at Kennebec Long Term Care at Gray Birch. He resided there well into my teen years and his passing. My family wasn't able to care for him at home due to his Parkinson's disease, but you can bet we were there with him every evening 6 days a week. I basically grew up in a long term care setting and this inspired me to become a CNA.

In 1999, I received my certification through Capital Area Technical Center. My very first job was at a skilled nursing and LTC facility that provides memory care for many types of people afflicted with dementia. After three years I left to pursue a better paying job as I had children to provide for. I did a lot of office jobs, and then settled with becoming a restaurant supervisor.

After caring for my Peperre until his passing in 2009, I asked myself why I ever gave up being a CNA. So I retested for my state exam and returned to what I love best, caring for people afflicted with memory challenges and in need of long term care. Getting up and going to work is sometimes a challenge with the physical and emotional work required. For example, today I could be best friends with an individual and tomorrow I may not be, but at the end of the day when I walk out of the building, I leave knowing that I have made a difference in someone's day. I hear so many times from families and friends; 'it takes a special person to do the job you do'. Yes it does!

A caregiver has to assist with bathing, dressing, feeding, and all of the daily activities that we ourselves do. This is physically hard work. Some of our residents are unable to speak or move independently. Some have no family or visitors. As a caregiver, lots of times just holding a hand, sitting and listening to a resident adds meaning to their days.

I often pick up extra shifts to spend time with residents and provide care, helping them complete activities of daily living that we take for granted. For example remembering to use the bathroom, change a shirt, or lift a utensil to your mouth. Also just being the person to give them a hug when they're sad because they can't find their mom or spouse. I can't stress enough the importance of this bill to help provide the care and hire the staff it takes to care for the elderly people of Maine particularly residents with behavior challenges and those stricken with cognitive impairment. Being a direct caregiver is much more than a job title, it is the love in your heart that you're willing to give to a resident. We are connected to our residents. Anyone hearing this message today would agree that you want to make sure that your loved one receives the best possible care. This is why I am here advocating today!

I support this bill because the people doing this work day in and day out deserve to be compensated at a competitive level. To the extent that the proposal before you today does this, I hope you will support it too. Thank you for listening.