



**Testimony of Gretchen Zeh-Higgins  
Program Director, Elder Independence of Maine,**

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services**

**In Support of LD 1350, Resolve, To Increase the Reimbursement Rate for  
Direct-care Workers Serving Adults with Long-term Care Needs**

**Sponsored by Speaker Eves**

**Hearing Date: May 6, 2015**

Good afternoon, Senator Brakey, Representative Gattine and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Gretchen Zeh-Higgins. I am a resident of Lewiston and I serve as the program director of Elder Independence of Maine, or EIM. EIM provides care coordination services to more than 3,800 older and disabled adults throughout the state who receive home and community based care. We are a division of Seniors Plus, the Area Agency on Aging for the Western part of Maine serving Androscoggin, Franklin and Oxford Counties. I am here today to testify in support of LD 1350, Resolve, To Increase the Reimbursement Rate for Direct-care Workers Serving Adults with Long-term Care Needs.

Our home based care system is moving towards a crisis situation. Because there has not been an increase in the reimbursement rates in 15 years, the agencies providing this vital service cannot stay competitive in the workforce.

That shouldn't be surprising. It is going to be tough to find people willing to drive ninety minutes to help an older adult with their toileting, bathing, dressing and housekeeping needs for less than \$10 an hour when Hannaford, Target, Wal-Mart and McDonalds and many other employers in Maine are offering new employees that much, or more.

Home based care workers operate in a challenging environment and need to respond quickly to emergencies. They also need to be incredibly independent because they almost always work alone in the home. I have worked as a CNA, as a med tech at a nursing facility and as a registered nurse in the hospital setting. CNA work in a nursing home is tough, but a major difference is that in a nursing home there is a lot of support around you. There is no such in-person support for home based care workers.

Because the agencies we work with are having trouble finding workers, more and more older and disabled adults are not getting the home care services they need (or not getting all of the services that have been authorized) as the table below illustrates:

| County       | PSS Hrs/week |
|--------------|--------------|
| Aroostook    | 279.5        |
| Androscoggin | 35.75        |
| Cumberland   | 942.5        |
| Franklin     | 4            |
| Hancock      | 27.25        |
| Kennebec     | 348.75       |
| Knox         | 53           |
| Lincoln      | 63.5         |
| Oxford       | 43.25        |
| Piscataquis  | 84.5         |
| Penobscot    | 170          |
| Sagadahoc    | 153.25       |
| Somerset     | 96.5         |
| Washington   | 14           |
| Waldo        | 62.5         |
| York         | 708.75       |
| <b>Total</b> | <b>3087</b>  |

Our collective mission – everyone who is part of the long-term care continuum - is keeping older and disabled adults at home. That is where they want to be and where their care is most affordable. Their health and safety is paramount.

But if we do not have enough people willing to take these jobs, we can't carry out our mission. This is especially the case with high-risk adults who have greater plans of care in terms of the number of hours they need to remain in their home. When those clients do not receive all of the hours they have been authorized to receive, they are more likely to end up in a hospital or institutional facility. Ultimately, that means they will pass away some place other than their home.

A good example of this is when older adults fall and injure themselves because they tried to move around without assistance. Many of our clients need help to move around in their home. They are authorized a specific number of hours to limit the number of times they try to do something on their own – whether it's as simple as a weekly trip to the grocery store or as serious as daily bathing or toileting themselves. Our clients – like many Maine people - value their independence. When the total number of hours they are authorized to receive aren't filled, they will be more likely to do these activities on their own. And that's when they get hurt.

We support all efforts to provide an increase in the reimbursement rate for Personal Support Services and Home Health Aides. Our population is getting older and we are running out of time to get a workforce in place to assist them.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'd be happy to answer any questions that you may have.