

Janet T. Mills
Governor

Jeanne M. Lambrew, Ph.D.
Commissioner



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Senator Erin Herbig, Chair
Representative Jessica Fay, Chair
Commission to Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues
#100 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0100

Dear Senator Herbig, Representative Fay, and Members of the Commission to Study Long-term Care Workforce Issues:

I wanted to respond in a timely way to your letter sent earlier this week that asks the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to provide “immediate relief in the form of a rate increase...”

The Commission’s authorizing legislation directed its report to the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. The recommendations in your letter would require a legislative appropriation. Maine State Legislature has granted DHHS neither the blanket authorization nor unlimited appropriations to unilaterally increase reimbursement rates for MaineCare services. We respectfully suggest the Commission direct its request to the Legislature.

The Commission also notes a desire for “ongoing predictability in rate review,” which we share. To inform the Legislature’s consideration of your request among others, DHHS is conducting a comprehensive evaluation of MaineCare’s rate setting system for all services, including those for long-term services and supports. This evaluation will include a comparison of what MaineCare pays to (1) five comparable state Medicaid programs; (2) Medicare; and (3) commercial health plans. The results will inform the next biennial budget. We are specifically looking to reform the complicated and outdated system of MaineCare reimbursement for nursing facility services. Governor Mills has directed DHHS to examine reforms that would promote simplicity, quality, value, transparency, and accountability.

Recognizing short-term challenges in institutional care settings, just last week Governor Mills announced her support for LD 1758, “An Act To Clarify and Amend MaineCare Reimbursement Provisions for Nursing and Residential Care Facilities.” Combined with current rate increases, LD 1758 will increase MaineCare nursing facility rates by 5.5 percent on average for fiscal year 2020. Reimbursement to nursing facilities has increased cumulatively by 40 percent since fiscal year 2012. This is more than most other MaineCare services and should significantly bolster the ability of our nursing facilities to provide quality care.

Page Two

As many witnesses at Commission meetings explained, MaineCare reimbursement rates are neither the sole cause nor the sole solution to ensuring a high-quality, accessible long-term services and supports system and the workforce to support it. Under the leadership of the Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS), DHHS has launched a comprehensive initiative to support aging in Maine. This includes a Long-Term Services and Supports Advisory Group. Its report, which will be published early in the new year, will describe ways to better coordinate care for Medicare-Medicaid dual eligible individuals as well as pathways for more home- and community-based options. These options will affect the workforce in that they empower consumers and families, which lessens the pressure on agencies and providers. And, harnessing assisted technology and other in-home supports will alleviate the need for home care workers for some Mainers.

We also continue to support workforce training, recruitment, and retention. This includes reviewing how DHHS programs can co-locate and collaborate with those of the Department of Labor. We are working on streamlining training curriculum, and are happy to respond to concerns as they arise, as noted in our response to your letter regarding the personal support specialist (PSS) curriculum timeline. The State is also addressing credentialing. For example, recent changes to recognize other states' certified nurse assistant (CNA) training programs has resulted in [1,200 new registered CNAs](#) in the last year. In addition, we also are working on lateral matrices for workers to be able to navigate across careers within the health sector. DHHS is hiring a health care workforce coordinator for the State who will identify the most pressing shortages and develop strategies with the private sector including, but not limited to, enhanced training programs, recruitment initiatives, and retention promotion.

In closing, DHHS views front-line workers in long-term care facilities, home, and community-based settings as the heart of the system. The hidden word in their job description is "compassion." They care for our parents as their ability to live independently declines. They support our children with intellectual or developmental disabilities as they age.

We appreciate your commitment and look forward to working with you on actionable, evidence-based solutions that support older Mainers and people with disabilities, as well as the people who care for them.

Sincerely,



Jeanne M. Lambrew, PhD
Commissioner

JML/klv

cc: Michelle Probert, Director, Office of MaineCare Services
Molly Bogart, Director of Government Relations