



**Direct Care and  
Support Professional**  
ADVISORY COUNCIL



***“Working together to make a  
difference.”***

Prepared by the Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

[www.maineombudsman.org/DirectCareSupport/](http://www.maineombudsman.org/DirectCareSupport/)



## The Maine Long-Term Care OMBUDSMAN PROGRAM

The Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program is a non-profit agency whose mission is to advocate for quality of care and life for residents in nursing homes, residential care, assisted living and for recipients of home care. Our services are free and confidential.

What does the Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program do?

- Educate residents, their family, and facility staff about residents' rights.
- Investigate and resolve complaints to improve residents' quality of life and care.
- Represent Long-Term Care consumer's interests before governmental agencies.
- Guide Long-Term Care consumers through the sometimes complex long-term care system.

Please contact us if you need assistance.

207-621-1079 / 800-499-0229

[www.maineombudsman.org](http://www.maineombudsman.org)

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# From Our Partners



The Council will be invaluable to Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) as we work on multiple strategies to expand the availability and career options of direct care and support professionals in Maine. The voice of the worker has been missing in these important policy debates, and the Council is filling that void, both directly through the members, and also by serving as a vehicle to reach other workers through focus groups, surveys and social media. They have already helped DHHS and the Department of Labor with a marketing campaign and we look forward to tapping their expertise as we all address Maine's workforce challenges.

Paul Saucier  
Director, Office of Aging and Disability Services



The focus groups with direct care and support professionals last year completed through the efforts of the LTC Ombudsman Program demonstrated how critically important it is for policy makers and organizational leaders to hear directly from the individuals doing this work in order to identify constructive and practical solutions to the care workforce challenges we currently face in Maine. I am excited to see the Advisory Council becoming a reality and look forward to the role this group can play as leaders and advocates, bringing their wisdom, creativity and perspectives to statewide dialogues and highlighting the vital roles they play in our health care system, our families and communities, and our economy.

Ruta Kadonoff, MA, MHS  
Vice President for Programs, Maine Health Access Foundation





The Maine Direct Care & Support Professional Advisory Council presents an exciting opportunity for direct care and support professionals to leverage their expertise

and skill to transform direct care job quality in Maine. By centering the voices and experiences of this critical workforce, the Council will act as the premiere resource for policymakers and legislators working to strengthen the long-term care sector.

To support Council members' success, PHI developed a series of four, 2-hour trainings. Training will be delivered online by PHI consultants to ensure accessibility and an engaging, enriching experience. Training will:

- Increase the overall confidence of Council members;
- Help Council members feel comfortable expressing their opinions in a public arena and refine their public speaking skills;
- Enable Council members to develop the ability to tell their stories and engage authentically with multiple audiences (other Council members, state department officials, legislators, etc.);
- Ignite their personal leadership skills, enabling them to engage and empower other direct care workers to take action in support of Maine's workforce initiatives.

Cassandra Martin-Himmons, LMSW  
Curriculum Developer, PHI





# The Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program

**W**e are very pleased to introduce you to the members of Maine's first Direct Care and Support Professional Advisory Council. Council members are employed in nursing homes, residential care, assisted living, and home care across the state. Some are new to the profession of providing direct care and direct support while others have many years of experience. All have joined the Council with the belief that their participation can make a difference. Together, their strong collective voice will inform policy decisions on issues that are most important to them as well as for thousands of direct care and direct support professionals in Maine.

There is much work to be done to support this essential workforce. The Council will have a central role in providing feedback and information that will help guide the work of the Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Office of Aging and Disability Services, DHHS Healthcare Workforce Development and the Department of Labor as they move forward in planning and implementing workforce initiatives.

We would like to thank the Maine Health Access Foundation (MeHAF) and the Maine DHHS, Office of Aging and Disability Services for their funding to support this important project. We look forward to our work with the Council.



Brenda Gallant  
Executive Director



Trinity Baker  
Project Manager





## About The Direct Care & Support Professional Advisory Council

The Direct Care & Support Professional Advisory Council was established in February 2022. Its purpose is to bring direct care and support professionals together from across the state to share their collective experiences, build leadership and advocacy skills, and make recommendations to policymakers about workforce initiatives that have the potential to transform direct care jobs in Maine.

As part of a contract with ETHOS marketing the Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program (LTCOP) conducted focus groups with direct care and support professionals from long-term services and support settings across the state. LTCOP initiated this project in response to concerns regarding access to care resulting from the statewide workforce shortage and recognized the need to support these critically needed professionals in establishing a strong collective voice. The findings from the focus groups supported establishing a council for Maine's direct care and support professionals.

Currently, most Council members participated in the original focus groups, and all members submitted an application for membership. Applications are reviewed by the steering committee comprised of representatives from LTCOP, Maine Health Access Foundation, PHI National, Department of Health and Humans Services (DHHS) Office of Aging and Disability Services and the Director of Workforce Development, DHHS. The steering committee is committed to ensuring that the Council represents the diversity of Maine's workforce and representation from all of Maine's long-term supports and services. Appointment terms are for one year.

Today, Council members meet with DHHS Office of Aging and Disability Services and the Department of Labor to learn about workforce initiatives being planned. Council members provide input to these agencies on workforce initiatives and serve as a point of contact for direct care and support professionals across the state.

The Council welcomes your involvement and is always interested in hearing from potential members. Please contact Trinity Baker, Project Manager, for more information; [tbaker@maineombudsman.org](mailto:tbaker@maineombudsman.org) or call 207-621-1079.



# Emily Skyers

*Certified Residential Medication Aide (CRMA)*



## **Setting:**

The Landing at Cape Elizabeth | Cape Elizabeth, Maine

## **History in the profession:**

I've worked in healthcare for four years.

## **Professional motivation:**

The needs are great; I love what I do because I can be of help to someone's life in some way.

## **Direct Care & Support Professional Advisory Council:**

Serving on the Council is a way to help get more information out there about being a caregiver and caring for those in need. As a Council member, I know how to get answers to a lot of my questions, and I can help make good decisions relating to our direct caregiver workforce.



“ *I love what I do because I help to put a smile on someone's face each day.* ”





# Carol Daigle

*Certified Residential Medication Aide (CRMA)*



**“** *My mother was the one who introduced me to the healthcare field. She worked the night shift and I (being 10 years old) was permitted to accompany her. I fell in love with the elderly and decided that would be my career path.*

## **Setting:**

St. André Health Care | Biddeford, Maine

## **History in the profession:**

I have been working in this field for 19 years and am still passionate about my work. My mother was the one who introduced me to the healthcare field. She worked the night shift and I (being 10 years old) was permitted to accompany her. I fell in love with the elderly and decided that would be my career path.

## **Direct Care & Support Professional Advisory Council:**

I am so grateful to be a member of the Direct Care Council. It is an honor and great privilege to have a voice to help educate and change things for the better for all healthcare professionals.



# Justin B. Dyer

**Certified Residential Medication Aide (CRMA)**

**Direct Support Professional (DSP)**

**Mental Health and Rehabilitation Technician 1 (MHRT1)**

**Qualified Brain Injury Support Provider (QBISP)**



## **Setting:**

Creative Works | Augusta, Maine

## **History in the profession:**

I've worked in health care for 23 years. As a child I was brought up around people with disabilities. These family members played a huge role in my life during childhood. When I got to be an adult, an opportunity fell in my lap to get my DSP and I have been here ever since.

## **Professional motivation:**

The experience of seeing people overcome their physical and/or mental barriers is rewarding beyond what any words can describe. The main reason why I came to the field is to help others gain their independence. This is the best gift you can give anyone.

## **Direct Care & Support Professional Advisory Council:**

Being on this new Council is my way to help make changes that will be more effective in how services are delivered to Mainers. I am looking forward to helping develop and get some of the projects off the ground. For me this is a way of giving back to the people of Maine. I also think being on this Council is going to be a wonderful learning experience and an opportunity to work with some good people.



***I would like to see everyone, regardless of ability or barriers, prevail, and live the best life possible. I stay in my job because I like to help people be the best they can be.***



# Paula Erickson

*Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)*



“ *Being on the Council is amazing! It’s great to know that my ideas may one day turn into actions!* ”

## **Setting:**

Winship Green Center for Health & Rehabilitation | Bath, Maine

## **History in the profession:**

I’ve worked as a CNA for 16 years. I chose to become a CNA in order to serve those in need.

## **Professional motivation:**

I love the relationships I develop with the residents, patients and their families. I’m an amazing advocate for those I serve. My work is very rewarding.

## **Direct Care & Support Professional Advisory Council:**

Being on the Council is amazing! It’s great to know that my ideas may one day turn into actions!



# Sushanthi Frank

*Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)*



**“** *When I learn how to take care of people who are sick or disabled it teaches me patience and compassion.*

## **Setting:**

The Cedars | Portland, Maine

## **History in the profession:**

I have been a CNA for 3 years.

## **Professional motivation:**

I got into health care because I have the desire to help people and make them feel that they are cared for. When I learn how to take care of people who are sick or disabled it teaches me patience and compassion. When they get better and are ready to go home, I know I have done good. The best part is bringing a smile to their face (through jokes and stories.)

## **Direct Care & Support Professional Advisory Council:**

Being on the Council, you can discuss the needs of direct care workers and share your opinion. At the same time, you have the chance to hear from others. It is a great opportunity and a pleasure to be a member of the Council.



# Stephanie Capano Hatcher

*Advanced Welle Instructor,  
American Heart Association Instructor  
Child Development Services (CDS) Curriculum Instructor  
Certified Residential Medication Aide (CRMA)  
Direct Support Professional (DSP)  
DSP Curriculum Instructor  
Mental Health and Rehabilitation Technician 1 (MHRT1)  
Mental Health Support Specialist (MHSS) Instructor*



## **Setting:**

NorthEast Residential Services | Gray, Maine

## **History in the profession:**

I started working in the field of Direct Care in April of 1993. My mother started working in Direct Care and Support when I was two years old. Since I was seven, I knew that I wanted to work in the field in some capacity.

## **Professional motivation:**

I love what I do because it helps others grow in life and heart. I enjoy training others because I love to see new Direct Care and Support Professionals realize this job is so much more than a paycheck. Putting a smile on someone's face or helping them accomplish a goal for the first time is the best feeling in the world; I helped someone live their best life possible!

## **Direct Care & Support Professional Advisory Council:**

I am completely honored to be invited to participate in this Council. Being a voice for those that work so hard, day in and day out, with little recognition is a key component to this Council. It is what I believe in. It is what I do. It is what I am passionate about.

“ *Work for a cause, not for applause. Live life to express, not to impress. Don't strive to make your presence noticed, just make your absence felt.* ”





# Ashley Johnston

*Bachelor of Arts in Premedical Biology  
with a Chemistry Minor*

*Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)*

*Personal Support Specialist (PSS)*



## **Setting:**

Maine Veterans' Homes | Caribou, Maine

## **History in the profession:**

I originally wanted to pursue a career in healthcare because I love helping people and interacting with people from all walks of life. I enjoy learning about people's life accomplishments and experiences. I have had the privilege of caring for some really amazing human beings over the years and I've enjoyed getting to know their families, some of whom I've retained friendships with long after the patient has moved on or passed away.

## **Professional motivation:**

I love getting to know people and forming a professional, yet personal relationship with them. I also love that I get to wake up every day and make someone's day brighter just by walking in the door. I love making my patients laugh; it makes me happy when I am able to turn their day around despite how challenging it might have been when the day started.

## **Direct Care & Support Professional Advisory Council:**

The people I care for are funny, educating, appreciative, and loving. Unfortunately, some can't get all of the help that they need due to a lack of qualified personnel. I have high hopes that the Council will be able to fix problems from inside the system, improve external opinions of the jobs that we do, and in turn attract more qualified workers to the field. I personally hope to gain improvement in my abilities to speak to the people responsible for legislating the necessary changes, and those who wish to join us in patient care.

**“After being in this field for over 35 years I still love coming to work. We never know what our day will hold; we may cheer for our patients' accomplishments, celebrate a life event, or hold a dying hand in its last moments of life. That's what keeps me coming back to work every day.”**



# Beth Jones

*K-8 certified teacher*

*Personal Support Specialist (PSS)*



## **Setting:**

New Acadia Solutions | Old Orchard Beach, Maine

## **History in the profession:**

I have been in the field since November 2021. We had a PSS for my grandmother so she could die in her own home rather than a nursing home. I wanted to be able to do that for someone else.

## **Professional motivation:**

I like what I do because it's a one-on-one setting and I know I'm keeping someone in their own home for as long as possible. I strive to preserve the client's dignity, allow for choices, foster as much independence as possible, and provide opportunities to enhance their quality of life.

## **Direct Care & Support Professional Advisory Council:**

I'm excited to be a member of the Council. Its formation means Maine cares enough about the population of people being served and the shortage of people serving them to do something about it. There's nothing better than getting input from the people in the trenches actually doing the work. I think it's impressive that Maine is willing to do this!



*I'm excited to be a member of the Council...There's nothing better than getting input from the people in the trenches actually doing the work.*



# Alesia Gay McBrayer

*Associates Degree in Emergency Medicine*

*Bachelor's Degree in Biology*

*Bachelor's Degree in Criminal Justice*

*Paramedic, Veteran, U.S. Army Medic*



“ *Through the years I have enjoyed getting to know people at their worst and helping them achieve their best.* ”

## **Setting:**

Consumer Directed Home & Community Based Program | Fort Fairfield, Maine

## **History in the profession:**

I've been working in health care for 36 years. I started when my oldest child was born at 28 weeks and the hospital felt that I could not care for her without special training. Through the years I have enjoyed getting to know people at their worst and helping them achieve their best.

## **Professional motivation:**

I love knowing that I can make a difference, big or small -they all count. I also love being able to advocate for others, especially those who cannot advocate for themselves.

## **Direct Care & Support Professional Advisory Council:**

Being a member of this Council is the biggest invitation to advocate. I am truly honored to have been chosen to help make the system of care work better for the workers and their patients.



# Tammy Jean Moody

*Personal Support Specialist (PSS)*



“ *I have a family member who is dealing with Alzheimer's, and I want to keep them home and want to help others do the same for their loved ones. They do much better at home with care.* ”

## **Setting:**

Hearts of Angels Home Care | Skowhegan, Maine

## **History in the profession:**

I've worked for over 25 years in home health.

## **Professional motivation:**

I want to help others to stay home. I feel good about helping others. I also appreciate making my own schedule. I have a family member who is dealing with Alzheimer's. I want to keep them home and I want to help others do the same for their loved ones. They do much better at home with care.

## **Direct Care & Support Professional Advisory Council:**

The health field is so short-handed, and housing is so limited that people who need care aren't able to get the right care. I want to be part of the solution in helping those stay home who can. I hope our work on the Council can make this field more marketable (better benefits, salary, etc.) We need to recruit more help and for people to see the need and rewards this profession gives. I want to be part of a team who solves problems and helps people get the care they want and need.



# Emily Curry

***Certified Residential Medication Aide (CRMA)***

***Direct Support Professional (DSP)***

***Personal Support Specialist (PSS)***



## **Setting:**

Foreside Harbor | Falmouth, Maine

## **History in the profession:**

I have worked in the health field for almost 27 years, first with adults with developmental disabilities, and then elder care. I was attracted to this profession because I know my work is making a difference in people's lives for the better.

## **Professional motivation:**

I love working with the elderly because they are amazing people with fascinating stories about their lives. I love getting to know them and learning everything I can from them, as well as being able to make their days a little happier.

## **Direct Care & Support Professional Advisory Council:**

I am so excited to be on the Council because I want to truly make a difference in how our roles are perceived. I want to make people excited about the opportunities out there to help on a human level, as well as make some wonderful connections along the way. It's about showing how important these jobs really are to everyone.



***“I am hoping this Council will be able to bring awareness to what an amazing and satisfying field healthcare can be, and get more people excited to do this important work. During this journey, I am hoping to gain leadership skills, and have our voices heard about the positive aspects of this work as well as bringing light to the challenges we face.”***





# Rachel K. Small

**Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)**

**Certified Residential Medication Aide (CRMA)**

**Mental Health and Rehabilitation Technician 1 (MHRT1)**

**Mental Health Rehabilitation Technician/ Community (MHRT/C) Personal Support Specialist (PSS)**



**“ I stay in caregiving because I have a fulfilling connection to people older than me. I have had that connection since I was a little girl, and it was reinforced by watching my grandmother care for people as well.**

## **Setting:**

Bridges Home Services | Augusta, Maine

## **History in the profession:**

I have been working in the healthcare field for 15 years. My mother got me into the mental health field when I was 19. That's where I got my MHRT-1 and CRMA. Unfortunately, it was not a good fit for me. So, I applied to a boarding home for the elderly because I had my CRMA and that is what they were hiring for. They started me in the Alzheimer's Unit of the facility, and I loved it!

## **Professional motivation:**

I have always been a natural caregiver and taking care of older people provides me with the opportunity to use that natural skill. It brings me immense joy to care for someone! I like when I walk into my clients' homes and bring them some happiness, just by being there and doing what I can to make their lives easier.

## **Direct Care & Support Professional Advisory Council:**

I joined the Council because I want everyone to know that being a caregiver is not an easy job. It deserves the recognition of being a career. I want to be involved so that I can see to it that being a direct care and support professional is a financially stable profession.



# Cheryl Steele

**Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)**  
**Home Health Aide (HHA)**



## **Setting:**

Androscoggin Home Healthcare + Hospice | Lewiston, Maine

## **History in the profession:**

For the past 42 years I have worked as a CNA. I started my career in a small facility in Auburn. Then in 1991, I started working as a home health aide. I assist, support and care for the needs of our clients, helping them to remain safely independent in the privacy of their own home. I have never looked back.

I got interested in home care because of the flexibility. I was able to see my kids off to school and was home when they returned. Yet, I was still able to enjoy working outside the home doing what I love, caring for people.

## **Professional motivation:**

There are many reasons why I love doing Home Healthcare:

- I get a good feeling when I listen to my client's stories and assist them with their needs for the time my team is in the home.
- Every day in home care is different; the variety is nice. Yet, the mission to assist my clients with their individual needs to remain safely in their home remains the same.

## **Direct Care & Support Professional Advisory Council:**

Though I may be a little nervous because of my shyness, I'm excited and honored to be a member of the Council. It's the first of its kind in Maine and really the USA. Being a member of the Council is not only exciting but a learning opportunity. Through my involvement I hope to make positive changes in health care to better meet the needs of the people of Maine and those who care for them, many who are direct care and support professionals like myself.

***“ I got interested in home care because of the flexibility. I was able to see my kids off to school and was home when they returned. Yet, I was still able to enjoy working outside the home doing what I love, caring for people.”***

# Kelley Thurston

**Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)  
Direct Support Professional (DSP)  
Hospice Aide, Med Tech**



**“ I don’t take myself too seriously, but I am extremely serious about being a caregiver. It is a great honor to provide compassionate care to people who need it. I have always felt I get more out of it than I give.**

## **Setting:**

Market Square Health Care Center | South Paris, Maine

## **History in the profession:**

I couldn’t wait to turn 16 so I could take the CNA course. I went into the field of direct care and support with the philosophy of caring for others as I would want them to take care of my beloved Grandma. I have done many aspects of direct care and support over my 37-year career. I started as a CNA in a nursing home, then became a DSP in a group home. I have been a Med Tech and a Hospice aide. I have worked in facilities, shared living homes, and private homes.

## **Professional motivation:**

Somewhere along the line I acquired the nickname Smiley. I love to smile and if I can make someone else smile all the better. I don’t take myself too seriously, but I am extremely serious about being a caregiver. It is a great honor to provide compassionate care to people who need it. I have always felt I get more out of it than I give.

## **Direct Care & Support Professional Advisory Council:**

I am excited to be on the Council and to have the chance to help develop a new culture of caregiving that both meets the needs of the person requiring care while providing support and fostering pride in the profession for the worker. Healthcare is a most important field and I not only want to see more qualified professionals but also want to retain the fantastic people who are already working so hard now.



# Laura Tremblay

*Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)*



“ *The residents and my coworkers are definitely my second family.* ”

## **Setting:**

Augusta Center for Health & Rehabilitation | Augusta, Maine

## **History in the profession:**

I graduated from Cony High School in 1998 along with vocational school which brought me to healthcare. I've been with the same long-term care provider since 1999.

## **Professional motivation:**

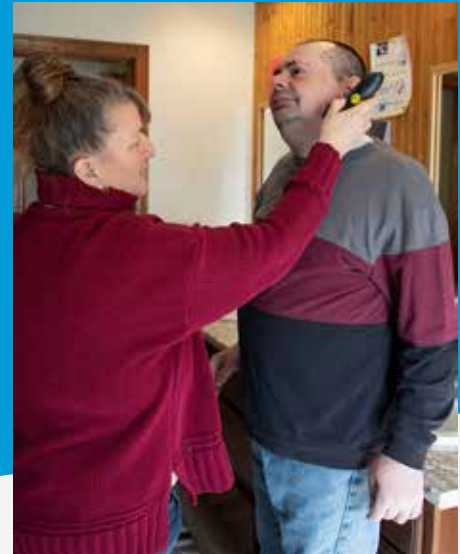
The residents and my coworkers are definitely my second family. I was honored to win the Excellence Award in 2018. I was truly blessed to receive it and am very thankful for it.

## **Direct Care & Support Professional Advisory Council:**

I'm excited to be a part of the Council for many reasons but the biggest reason is to advocate for my residents and fellow CNAs, nurses, med techs, LPNs and all other professionals in the healthcare world. I love my job very much but feel like I don't get enough time to do everything that comes with the job and the care. The world is changing; three years ago, COVID-19 made a huge impact in healthcare and we all feel it.

# Gail True

*American Heart Association First Aid and CPR/  
Professional Development Teacher Certified  
Residential Medication Aide (CRMA)  
Direct Support Professional (DSP)  
Mental Health and Rehabilitation Technician 1  
(MHRT1)*



**“ I love my job because I have the opportunity to help people have the best life by teaching skills and advocating for them.**

## **Setting:**

John F Murphy Homes | Auburn, Maine

## **History in the profession:**

I have been working in the healthcare field for 27 years. It all started when I was working retail in Rhode Island and had friends working in a group home in Maine. They made it sound fun, so I decided to apply where they worked when I moved to Maine in 1995.

## **Professional motivation:**

I love my job because I have the opportunity to help people have the best life by teaching skills and advocating for them. Watching the people I support grow and succeed is the best reward.

## **Direct Care & Support Professional Advisory Council:**

I am excited to be on the Council and to advocate for DSPs to have a better working environment. I hope to enlighten the broader community to what we do as DSPs.



# Jeremy Walter Wyman

*Behavioral Healthcare Provider (BHP)*

*Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)*

*Educational Technician*

*Hospital housekeeper*

*Personal Support Specialist (PSS)*



**“ Let’s work together and use our voices for the people who we take care of. They need us to speak up for them and create positive change for everyone involved.**

## **Setting:**

A&M Home Care | Bangor, Maine

## **History in the profession:**

I’ve worked in healthcare for six years.

## **Professional motivation:**

I want to help people. I love building a rapport with my clients and I love making their lives better. A lot of times I become their best friend. It helps me see that we are all family.

## **Direct Care & Support Professional Advisory Council:**

Being on the Council means I can be more involved in the healthcare system and make more of an impact. I hope we will be able to get more people interested in the field of direct care because clients/patients need our help. We can’t help those who need it when we don’t have the staff.

# Acknowledgements





**Direct Care and  
Support Professional**  
ADVISORY COUNCIL



The Maine Long-Term Care  
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