

December 21, 2022

President Troy Jackson
Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Testimony Against “LD 3 An Act to Establish the Winter Energy Relief Payment Program to Aid Residents with High Heating Costs and to Finalize the COVID Pandemic Relief Payment Program”

President Jackson, Speaker Talbot Ross, and Distinguished Members of the Committee,

My name is Marco Orlando and I live in Brewer. I am a person who receives waiver services in Maine and I am also a concerned citizen on home heating costs. I have been keeping up with the progress of this home heating issue. Heating costs are a concern for my parents and also for other people who live with disabilities. Initially, I was supportive of this bill and was a little annoyed that it didn't pass the first round and the vote was so close. Then I looked into it a bit more of where the money was coming from to send these checks and I had to ask myself, “what are they doing?”

I am submitting this testimony Against LD 3 because I am not supportive of using money meant for Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) that provides services and supports for people living with disabilities in Maine. I get that the money must come from somewhere, but again people like me who use these necessary HCBS programs have no say in how the money is applied. I think that the money needs to be left alone and let it be used for what it was intended.

This money was intended to pay for the much-needed HCBS programs in our state which already has its own crisis. We have long wait lists for services for people who qualify but have not yet been funded. And then we also have an extreme staffing shortage to provide the necessary services. People are not able to get as much service coverage as they need and qualify for. I have personally taken a hit to my hours during COVID. My services are now down to only 2 days a week. If I had more coverage on other days of the week it would be huge for me. I would be able to get other stuff done. I would be able to access my community more. Sometimes I find alternatives to get my needs met by relying on my parents. I am lucky to have them there to help me out, but I know they are getting older, and this is also a concern. What happens when my parents aren't around anymore? I have been trying to mentally prepare myself for this. If I can get all of the services I qualify for, it would help.

I get that home heating costs are a major concern for all Mainers. If the money from these checks would be coming from somewhere else, I would be for this. I just think that people with disabilities have suffered enough, and the state of Maine does not have a great track record when it comes to the issue of disability. The money was intended for HCBS and should stay with HCBS to help solve the problems of the wait list and staffing shortages.

I also want to say this reminds me of the self-advocate motto “Nothing About Us Without Us.” If we had a seat at the table like we should, you would probably hear that home heating costs are a big concern, but so are getting services. Don’t sacrifice people who depend on these services for a temporary fix to the home heating cost problem.

I thank you for your time and consideration in hearing my concerns.

Sincerely,

Marco Orlando

Brewer, ME