



December 21, 2022
President Troy Jackson, Chair
Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross, Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
100 Statehouse Station
Augusta, Maine 04333

Testimony Neither for Nor 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”

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

My name is Monique Stairs and I am the Executive Director of Speaking Up For Us (SUFU). SUFU has been the self-advocacy network in Maine since 1993 and we are an established 501(c)3 non-profit. Self-Advocacy is part of the civil rights movement for people living with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) to advocate and voice their opinions on issues that are important to them. Self-advocates are the people who have the lived experience of what it means to live with a disability. Our Board of Directors is made up 100% of adults living with I/DD, which makes us a unique organization.

I am submitting this written testimony neither for nor 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.”**

Home heating costs are a major concern for all Mainers, especially those who live on extremely low income like many people who live with a disability. I admire this administration for attempting to solve the problem and putting forth emergency legislation. However, when doing my due diligence to understand what this legislation included and where the money would be coming from to fund the \$450 payments, I was surprised to learn it includes reappropriating money from Home and Community Based Services (HCBS). For this reason, I am for taking emergency action to address the home heating costs, but against using funds from the HCBS waiver to help pay for this measure.

Self-advocates and other disability rights advocates have spoken out regarding the issue of the wait lists for waiver services in our state and the staff shortages occurring in agencies providing HCBS. The developmental disability service industry is already underfunded. Reappropriating HCBS funds to assist in providing home heating cost assistance is a solution that takes from one system in crisis (developmental services) and places a band-aid on an issue that needs more than a one-time payment (home heating costs).

I urge the committee to review and consider alternative measures that will be able to address the home heating costs, while keeping any and all funding that can be used for HCBS appropriated to HCBS as intended. People living with disabilities need to have access to their communities, receive the supports and services they need to lead a meaningful life, and have workers paid a living wage to provide these necessary services.



There is no doubt that Maine has been in a Direct Care Worker crisis for years and due to compounding factors with the COVID-19 pandemic the Direct Care Workforce is facing critical challenges regarding staff turnover, and position vacancy. The worker shortage has affected all sectors, but has been especially difficult for the direct care sector.

Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) were created to move people who live with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities out of institutions and into their communities. Maine closed Pineland in 1996 and has been serving people under HCBS to meet their support needs. People who live with disabilities are humans who deserve the same dignity, respect and rights as every single citizen in our state. We want to work towards ensuring that all Mainers who live with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities are able to live the life of their choosing and are valued.

For these reasons, I am asking the committee to consider not reappropriating funding from HCBS in this bill, but to explore alternatives by considering reduction in the payments or finding money from another source that does not take money away from people living with developmental disabilities.

Thank you for your time and consideration in submitting this testimony. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Monique Stairs, Executive Director, Speaking Up For Us

Email: programsufu@sufumaine.org

Cell Phone: (207) 476-5500

