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April 13, 2023

Re: LD 744, Resolve, to Direct the Department of Health and Human Services to Perform Rate Studies and Rate Determinations for Providers of Certain Services for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorder

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Cullen Ryan, and I am the Executive Director of Community Housing of Maine or CHOM. I am also the parent of a 26-year-old son with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (ID/DD). I serve as Chair of the Maine Coalition for Housing and Quality Services, a coalition of some 4000 people, consisting primarily of parents, that focuses on housing and quality services for people with ID/DD. I also serve as chair of the Maine Developmental Services Oversight and Advisory Board (MDSOAB).

I am testifying in strong support of LD 744, Resolve, to Direct the Department of Health and Human Services to Perform Rate Studies and Rate Determinations for Providers of Certain Services for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorder. This bill would direct DHHS to conduct rate studies and rate determinations for home and community benefits and support services for members of the MaineCare program with intellectual disabilities or autism spectrum disorder. And this bill would direct DHHS to convene a working group to advise the Department on the development of a daily rate payment system for agency home support service providers to be incorporated into the rate determinations. The department would be required to implement the rates determined no later than January 31, 2025.

I urge the Committee to support any bills which would increase the rates for HCBS, specifically rates for direct support professionals (DSPs).

The reduced rates over the past decade have made it progressively harder for providers to hire and retain direct care staff, or DSPs, the people who work with my son and others with ID/DD. DSPs are the very nexus of the system of care. Direct service professionals need to be paid enough to want to work in the field to begin with, and to stay in the field once they've begun their careers. If agencies can't hire anyone, if agencies can't retain anyone, people like my son won't receive services. Hiring and retaining essential support service staff has become increasingly more difficult as starting hourly wages at places like McDonalds and Walmart, which require far less training/credentials than DSPs, have increased dramatically amid the workforce crisis. DSPs ought to be paid a professional salary commensurate with the work expected and the training required.

And providers need to be able to keep their doors open while paying a wage high enough to accomplish this. The current rates, though improved in recent years thanks to investments by the Legislature and the Department, are not yet sustainable for providers to succeed in hiring and retaining staff. This ultimately hurts the recipients of needed services. Despite the great need, agencies can only lose money for so long before it becomes completely untenable to provide services.

LD 744, and other bills before this Committee during this Legislative Session, would see that the rates for Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) are increased through a thoughtful, inclusive process to ensure providers can adequately compensate staff. This will drastically help agencies attain and retain dedicated direct support professional staff, ensuring that people in Maine with ID/DD have access to quality, continuous, essential support services.

I believe helping everyone reach their full potential is the way to go. I hope that you will invest in helping people with intellectual/development disabilities have access to and receive the services they need.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.