

LD 744 An Act to Ensure Access to Services for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities by Requiring Rate Studies for Home and Community-based Services.

My name is Diane Boas and I am the parent of a 31 yr. old man with an intellectual disability and a mental health diagnosis that compounds his intellectual disability. He lives in a small group home in South Portland managed by Woodfords Family Services. His services are covered under the Section 21 Waiver.

My son just started a new job, he regularly attends religious services, he walks and shops in his community, he votes. He can only do these things with support from his direct support providers, his DSPs.

My son's behavior is erratic and sometimes unsafe. Due to complexity of his needs, he is not a candidate for shared living, nor can he live alone. His needs can only be met in a group home with support from consistent, well-trained staff. The group home model works best for individuals like my son who have higher support needs. And contrary to what critics say, it is because my son lives in a group home that he is an active, contributing member of his community. DSPs are the heart of home and community-based services. They ensure his daily needs are met and give him access to activities of his choosing. Without qualified DSPs, my son could not live his life with dignity and meaning.

However, under the current rate system, DSPs cannot afford to accept or remain in jobs at group homes and community support programs, even when its work they love to do. Without staff, group homes and community support programs will not survive, much less thrive. While the group home model is not being eliminated by statute, it is being dismantled by attrition. The system is falling apart and it's happening fast.

I've seen 75 group homes and 56 day programs close. I've seen adults like my son displaced and forced to move away from their families and friends. I've seen adults like my son spend weeks living in hospital emergency departments because there is nowhere else for them to go.

I live with uncertainly and fear about my adult son's life once I'm not here to advocate for him.

As our elected officials, I hope you care about my son and families like ours. I hope you share my belief that he deserves a good quality of life. I ask you to demonstrate your belief in him and others like him by supporting this bill requiring DHHS to conduct rate studies for MaineCare Sections 21 & 29 services, as soon as possible, in calendar year 2024 with new rates implemented by January 1, 2025. **DHHS is planning to do a rate study in 2025** but too many individuals with I/DD are in crisis now, due in large part to lack of staffing.

We cannot wait any longer.

