



Veritas Care of Maine

True Care on Time

Senator Baldacci's (bill sponsor) amendment

Testimony of: Dr. Maxwell K. Chikuta PhD.,PPA, PH

In Support of 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.

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

April 13, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committees.

My name is Dr. Maxwell Chikuta Ph.D. MPPA, PH founder, and CEO at VERITAS CARE OF MAINE, located in Portland, Maine.

For more than three years, we have been serving adult individuals who have been diagnosed with intellectual disabilities or autism spectrum disorder and who have received Section 19, 20, 21, and 29 waivers to live in an integrated community setting rather than in an intermediate care facility.

Our agency follows HCBS rules, a family-living support model whereby individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities live in a managed care facility provided by our agency and is set in a residential neighborhood with easy access to community resources.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 744 which would direct DHHS to conduct rate studies in 2024 for MaineCare HCBS Group Home and Community Supports and Community Membership services for people with intellectual disabilities or autism spectrum disorder. This bill would also direct the department to establish a workgroup to help determine a daily rate for Group Home services and through the proposed amendment adjusts the minimum staffing level to 85% after the Appendix K waiver ends in November and before new rates would be available in January 2025.

In support of LD 744, Veritas Care of Maine is supporting the increase in reimbursement to better support the individuals we serve. You will agree with me that the cost of living has skyrocketed nationally wide, we have seen an increase in Housing (Rentals, Mortgages), food, heating oil, insurance, electricity, water, and sewerage, snow removal, lawn mowing, and house maintenance to name but a few, but not to forget increase in wages.

I lost 9 employees simply because they left my organization to join Abbott in Westbrook where they were offered two times the hourly wage, I was offering them. I am in the process of closing my group home in Portland, Maine simply because I cannot afford the rental increase. The closing of this group home will negatively impact the lives of three Mainers who deserve to live in the setting of their choices.

All these increases are happening in a blink of an eye, but without an increase in reimbursement from the department, it is like asking agencies to provide more service with few funds. Good help is hard to find, and we have challenges to hire DSPs/CRMA, the hourly rate, and overtime.

I would like to remind you that we are not in the manufacturing sector where they can have the choice of sourcing their raw materials at a cheaper price. We are serving humanity, and the lives of the people we serve deserve better or higher quality services. We cannot continue to provide better services or higher quality services with less. Your support will be highly appreciated.

I appreciate the Department's efforts to invest in workforce development and the cost-of-living adjustments received to date, and flexibilities to date, however a viable rate, that will sustain a competitive wage is critical and cannot wait.

I urge your support. Thank you for your

time and consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dr. Maxwell K. Chikuta

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VERITAS CARE OF MAINE Inc
LD 744

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