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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.

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 work group to help determine a daily rate for Group Home services and through the proposed amendment adjust the minimum staffing level to 85% after the Appendix K waiver ends in November and before new rates would be available in January 2025.

My name is Barbara Alberda. I am the Manager of Intellectual and Developmental Disability Services at the Social Learning Center of Tri-County Mental Health Services. The Social Learning Center is a center based community support service that offers people opportunity to interact with long time friends, opportunity to volunteer, explore work opportunities, and be part of the Lewiston/Auburn/Community at large. The Social Learning Center has been a division of Tri County Mental Health Services for 47 years. Sadly, the cost of doing business and workforce crisis has become a hardship and we will be closing our doors in June. Despite having plenty of people on our waitlist to serve and people who are only attending a small percentage of their authorized hours, we simply don't have the staff to increase census. It is heart breaking to close this valued and reputable service in Lewiston after all these years. Many of the people I serve are seniors and people who have significant physical and cognitive disabilities. They have a wide variety of interests and tolerance for getting out and about both physically and emotionally.

I also wear another hat, that of Chair of the Community Support, Work Support, Community Membership Committee of Maine Association for Community Service Providers (MACSP). I have been in this role for nearly two years and just this morning, the committee took up the conversation of how are businesses surviving under the weight of Community Service shortfalls. People shared that the increased costs of documentation, the low reimbursement rate, the cost of vehicles/mileage to provide the necessary community exploration, inclusion, and meaningful engagement are all making the service untenable. The rate currently used is not based on the actual services mandated for Waiver Section 21 and 29. This study will assist in formulating a reasonable expectation for the cost to companies to provide the vital out of home experience that we all need to grow and thrive in our lives. Collecting actual data from these providers and understanding the mandates of HCBS is crucial. Previous rate studies cannot compare with the amount of documentation detail for example that is now required. For example, we serve a man with significant behavioral challenges due to anxiety. He loves to get out 1:1 and spend time exploring Lewiston, given that he is non verbal and cannot tell us where he wants to go or what he wants to see or any of his personal history, we must explore places, observe his demeanor and make conclusions to then try again later to learn more about where he might find a place of familiarity like the TV Show Cheers—where will his “NORM” impact be. Where will he be accepted valued and appreciated for who he is? I'm sure you can imagine that the time it takes to document the observation is much more than a simple statement that “He went to the fire department to look at the trucks after showing staff a firetruck in a

magazine.” Additionally, this man receives 1:1 due to his behavioral challenges when anxious. That funding is not addressed in the current rate structure for community supports. This type of service is not feasible for an agency to provide and survive without appropriate funding.

I wear yet another hat and that is of a sister/guardian. My sister lives in a group home in Southern Maine. She has been essentially home bound for nearly 3 years due a medical event in Feb 2020. She quickly found herself unemployed and without a community support program due to covid. Her life has been static now due to large community support waitlists and staffing in her home using agency or temp staffing that cannot take her out and don't really understand her. For my sister, having a sustainable rate for residential services is crucial, the inability to hire long-term staff that can assist her to grow and thrive in her own home has caused her much distress in the past three years. Turnover causes tremendous grief for people whose basic care is dependent on others. The drain this causes on the long term staff who are dedicated is evident in burnout. I can't even speak to the cost of overtime. Staff tell me all the time that they are working over. The cost of temp staff too is excessive, but 24/7 service is just that 24/7. She and her housemates need someone present for their safety and care.

You can make a huge difference for my sister, residentially and in her community/work life. She had a career, with support, for nearly 30 years on the same job, three-four days a week. She attended a community support program on her days off. She had a meaningful place in her community. We would run into people all over the place that knew her from work or her presence in her town. Huge waitlists for these services have seriously curtailed her life.

As you can see from my examples, a serious investment in workforce development and a viable rate, that will sustain competitive wages based on today's mandates and work actually being done, is vital

I appreciate the Department's efforts thus far with workforce, COLA's to residential programs (Community Supports were left out) and flexibilities to date under the Waiver K. There is still much work to be done. Please support this bill. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,

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