

Testimony of Melissa Knutson

Board of Directors, Independence Association

In Support of Section 2 of LD 2243

Hearing for LD 2243 Resolve, Directing the Department of Health and Human Services to Amend MaineCare Rules Governing Certain Types of Behavioral and Mental Health Services and to Form a Stakeholder Group to Study Methods for Improving Those Services

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services March 7, 2024

Good Morning, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony in support of Section 2 of LD 2243.

I am Melissa Knutson. I sit on the board of directors for Independence Association. We have been a non-profit organization serving children and adults with developmental disabilities since 1966. We own and operate a six bed section 97 PMNI in Freeport. We have operated that group home for 30-years, and it continuously loses money. After the rate determination for Section 97 Appendix F was not addressed in 2023 and we found out it was not going to be addressed in 2024, our board of directors, voted to close the program.

This was a difficult decision, because four of the residents have lived there for over 25 years, and all six residents are over the age of 60, with two septuagenarians and one octogenarian.

Independence Association can no longer carry the cost of this home, which has experienced a loss of (378,488) over the last seven years. Compounding this loss is the fact that we are owed \$170,000 from the past five cost reports which have not yet been reconciled by the department of audit. I understand that the division of audit is short staffed, but we are still short approximately 30% of our staffing needed to fully support our clients. Continuing to ignore the needs of citizens who reside in PNMI's erodes our trust in DHHS.

DLRS, OADS, OMS and the Director of Compliance was formally notified of our decision to discontinue Section 97 effective 06/30/2024. Outside of Mr. Logan, who acknowledged receipt of our notice, none of the departments have responded. By discontinuing Section 97 services, We also had to provide each resident a letter of discharge notifying them that we will no longer provide Section 97 services, and they will need to either find a new Section 97 facility, or transition to Section 21 and choose a provider that offers per diem group home services or a shared living arrangement no later than 06/01/2024.

We plan on converting that to a Section-21 group home effective 07/01/2024 and would gladly serve them in the same home if they should choose.

This decision has made our leadership look heartless, even to local representatives who do not understand the system.

We need financial relief immediately. Although section 5 of the bill is to develop a stakeholder group designed to develop more sustainable models for Section 97 Appendices E and F, we have already determined that the model is not sustainable.

In the meantime, I urge the HHS committee to remove the anxiety of the 6 residents at our PMNI facility in Freeport, and streamline their transition to Section 21-Priority 1, so they do not continue to fear being homeless in June.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melissa Knutson', written in a cursive style.

Melissa Knutson  
Board of Directors  
Independence Association