

WORK FIRST Inc.

P.O. BOX 86
FARMINGTON ME 04938
TELEPHONE 778-3200
FAX 778-4632

January 21,2025

Senator Rotundo, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Gattine, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of both the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services

I am writing to ask for your support to restore and allocate the funding needed for January 1, 2025, MaineCare service rate cost of living adjustments in the supplemental budget, LD209.

LD 209 An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Year ending June 30,2025.

My name is Linda LaRue-Keniston. I am the Executive Director of a program called Work First Inc.

Our organization provides Work Support and Community Support to 48 Adult Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities in the Farmington area. We have been providing services to our citizens in this area for 51 years. Our programs offer services using section 21 and section 29 Waiver dollars.

I am very concerned about the recent suspension of the cost of living adjustment (COLA) for MaineCare rates that was scheduled to take effect on January 1,2025.

On July 1,2024 we had anticipated the COLA to begin in January 2025. All decisions and budget projections were based on the COLA increase. This suspension jeopardizes the very high-quality services that our community has been receiving over the years. The hiring and retaining of staff are a critical component to the quality delivered to the Individuals with disabilities. The increase in staff wages that was offered on July 1 was because of the promised COLA expected to begin in January. We gave out these increases to well deserved Direct Support Staff. It also helped us to increase the entry wage amount to attract more potential DSP's.

When the COLA was suspended it set in motion an unsettled deficit-based budget and the potential for staff reductions which leads to a reduction in services to the Individuals with Intellectual disabilities.

We cannot take back the increases in wages that were offered on July 1,2024. We also will not be able to complete some vehicle repair that was scheduled. This causes concerns for the condition of the vehicles used to transport individuals with disabilities.

I urge you to restore the January 1,2025 COLA for all MaineCare rates in the supplemental budget.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of this request. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Linda LaRue-Keniston". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L'.

Linda LaRue-Keniston

Executive Director

lindalk@workfirstinc.org

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