

P.O. Box 1106
25 Winter Street
Gardiner, ME 04345
(207) 582-8021

Testimony of Heidi Mansir, Uplift, Inc.

LD 209: An Act for Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for State Government Expenditures, and to Amend Certain Provisions of Law Essential for State Government Operations for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2025

Position: Neither for nor Against
Date: January 23, 2025

Good afternoon, Senators Rotundo and Ingwersen, Representatives Gattine and Meyer, and honorable members of the Appropriations, Financial Affairs, and Health and Human Services Committees.

I am Heidi Mansir, Executive Director of Uplift, Inc. I appreciate the opportunity to submit written testimony regarding the supplemental budget. I urge your support in restoring and allocating the necessary funding for the MaineCare service rate cost-of-living adjustments effective January 1, 2025, as outlined in LD 209.

Uplift, Inc. is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing group home, employment, community support, shared living, case management, and behavioral health services to approximately 150 adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities under MaineCare Sections 21, 29, 13, and 65. While our services extend from Portland to Bangor, our primary focus is the Kennebec Valley region, including Gardiner, Augusta, Winthrop, Waterville, and Randolph. We employ 100 residents of Maine and have been serving this community for 66 years.

Having worked at Uplift for over 30 years, I have witnessed many budget proposals and “financial crises.” However, I have never been more concerned about the sustainability of services for individuals in our community or Uplift's capacity to maintain these essential services. We have had to close two homes in recent years due to our inability to hire sufficient Direct Support Professionals (DSPs), and we are currently contemplating the closure of another. Uplift simply cannot compete in the local job market.

The National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services (NASDDDS) and the Human Services Research Institute (HSRI) recently released the final “**NCI State of the Workforce for IDD® 2023**” report, which provides extensive data on provider agencies and the DSP workforce serving adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Key highlights include in bold text below:

- **The median hourly wage for DSPs nationwide is \$17.20**, while Uplift's starting wage for untrained individuals is \$17.25 per hour with full benefits. Currently, we have 19 open positions, representing nearly a 20% vacancy rate. We lack the funds to raise the starting wage to 125% of the new minimum wage.
- **The average turnover ratio nationwide is 39.7%**, whereas Uplift's turnover is close to 50%. Many employees leave once they realize the demanding nature of the work and see they can earn more in retail.



P.O. Box 1106
25 Winter Street
Gardiner, ME 04345
(207) 582-8021

- **On average, 38.1% of agencies report turning away or ceasing to accept referrals due to staffing shortages.** Uplift is currently limiting referrals and has 12% of our beds vacant for similar reasons.

I want to express my gratitude to the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services Committees for their past efforts to secure funding for organizations supporting Maine's residents. The statutes that mandate the State to provide an annual COLA (22 M.R.S.A §3173-J) and to adjust MaineCare direct service rates to 125% of the minimum wage (22 M.R.S.A § §7402) have been crucial for Uplift's operations. I am deeply troubled by the recent budgetary suspension of this statutory obligation, which jeopardizes essential services and the dedicated workers who provide them. The suspension of the COLA places agencies like Uplift at heightened risk of closure, especially amidst rising living costs and minimum wage.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony. I welcome any questions you may have.

Heidi Mansir
Executive Director, Uplift, Inc.
heidi.mansir@upliftmaine.org

Heidi Mansir
Uplift, Inc., Executive Director