



Testimony of Azel Residential Care, L.L.C.

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

Neither for nor Against

January 23, 2025

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

My name is Claude Munyamahoro. I am the Chief Executive Officer of Azel Residential Care, L.L.C.

I appreciate the opportunity to present to the Committee this testimony on the supplemental budget.

I 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, *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*.

Azel Residential Care, L.L.C. (Azel) is a residential care company of over fifty (50) employees supporting fifteen (15) individuals with intellectual disabilities and/or Autism Spectrum Disorder under MaineCare Section 21 from the Lewiston/Auburn areas to Bangor, Maine. Azel strives to provide the individuals supported by the company with the highest quality of life by providing the individuals with safe, high-quality, and integrated environments free from conflicts and restraints, where they can grow and gain confidence in their abilities to achieve their daily and long-term goals.

I am deeply concerned about the recent budgetary suspension of the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for MaineCare rates. This decision profoundly impacts Mainers, including those who receive these essential services and the dedicated workers who provide their care and support. The suspension of COLA puts Maine's vital service system at significant risk, especially as the costs of living and minimum wage continue to rise.

Previous COLAs have provided tremendous support to help Azel reach three of its primary goals; creating welcoming, comfortable environments to instill and promote consumer and family satisfaction with Azel's services and supports; employing, training, and guiding qualified Direct Support Professionals who engage in continuous monitoring, feedback, and improvement activities with Azel's consumers; and providing individualized services to each consumer based on their specific support plans to best serve them.

Not only will Azel struggle to meet those goals without a COLA, but also, Azel will be forced to redesign how it offers its services to the dependent individuals supported by the company and risk denying spots for tentative consumers looking to find support with Azel in the future.

During the intake process for one of Azel's consumers, the individual expressed that she had been struggling with community inclusion, but enjoyed going to fairs. On the day after she moved into Azel's facilities, Azel was able to provide her and her support staff with a trip to the Fryeburg fair, allowing the individual to partake in an activity she enjoyed while enhancing her social skills and allowing her the opportunity to be comfortable in the community in an integrated setting. This has become a yearly tradition, along with other community outings, that Azel will no longer be able to provide should there be no COLA.

COLA is also necessary to assist with overtime pay, as Direct Support Professionals find themselves frequently working over forty (40) hours per week to supplement a deteriorating workforce in the critical field of support care.

Please restore the January 1, COLA for all MaineCare rates in the supplemental budget.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony. Please contact me with any questions you may have.

Claude Munyamahoro

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