



Testimony of Martin Puckett, Executive Director, Central Aroostook Association

*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 Martin Puckett. I am the executive director of Central Aroostook Association.

I write you today to share with you the impact of not restoring and allocating 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*.

Central Aroostook Association was founded in 1959 by a group of parents that deeply cared for their children with developmental disabilities. They wanted basic, yet essential services in their community. We provide those essential services still to this day in the forms of Adult Services, Children Supports, Case Management, Home Supports, Residential Services, Shared Living, and OTC- a K-12 special purpose private school. The area we serve is the size of Rhode Island and Connecticut combined- all of Aroostook County! We have 114 dedicated employees and serve over 400 amazing individuals.

The budgetary suspension of the COLA for MaineCare rates 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. Not only do I fear the impacts of the suspension for CAA and other providers; my main concern is the individuals that we serve.

To illustrate the struggle, in 2019, CAA operated six residential waiver homes, serving 16 individuals with a staff of 46. Due to ongoing staffing shortages and increasing operational costs, today we have two homes, serving six individuals. While we need 18 staff to fill the shifts adequately, we have 12 dedicated staff who show up to work in poor weather conditions, and sacrifice time with their own families on holidays, to provide this essential service. The budget suspension of COLA will have a negative impact to our services and will further imperil our residential program. We have offered a COLA for our deserving staff for 2025, with the understanding that the COLA for MaineCare would be funded. As with other providers, we will have to evaluate program adjustments.

There are unique challenges facing providers in Northern Maine, especially in a service center community. With a

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shortage of workers, large employers offering higher wages, not to forget the housing shortage- we feel the pressures of the impact acutely. Most importantly; if we are not able to sustain our residential operations, and there are no residential programs available in the county, families will be faced with a terrible decision to settle for residential openings hours away.

***Please consider the impact on the individuals who rely on MaineCare funded services and their families when you place your vote on restoring 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.

Martin Puckett  
Central Aroostook Association