



## Testimony of Morrison Center

*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*

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 Danielle Loring, and I am the Executive Director of Morrison Center. I deeply appreciate the opportunity to address you today on behalf of our organization and the individuals and families we serve across Maine. I am here to speak in strong support of restoring funding for the January 1, 2025, MaineCare cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) in the supplemental budget, LD 209.

Morrison Center has been a cornerstone of support for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities for more than 70 years. Over that time, we have expanded our services and now support more than 1,100 individuals across every county in Maine. Our comprehensive services include case management, shared living, community supports, education, and residential care - services that are vital to the well-being of the individuals we serve. We employ approximately 200 dedicated team members who work tirelessly to meet the needs of the individuals in our care, ensuring they receive the support they deserve.

The suspension of the COLA for MaineCare rates is deeply concerning to us, as it directly threatens the sustainability of the services we provide. Without this adjustment, we may face significant challenges in maintaining the high-quality care our clients rely on. The implications are far-reaching, from potential service reductions to increased difficulty in hiring and retaining qualified staff. The suspension could also worsen growing waitlists and create a dangerous gap in the care and services needed by vulnerable individuals across the state.

Some of our key concerns include:

- **Service Sustainability:** Without the COLA, we will likely need to reassess our service levels, potentially reducing hours or making difficult decisions about which services we can continue to offer.
- **Hiring & Retention:** Attracting and retaining skilled staff is already a challenge. Competitive wages and benefits are essential to maintaining a stable, experienced workforce. Without the COLA, we risk losing invaluable team members and struggling to fill critical positions.
- **Rising Costs:** As inflation and employee-related costs continue to rise, the financial burden on organizations like ours grows heavier. The COLA is essential to mitigating these challenges and ensuring that we can continue to provide high-quality care.

We've heard directly from individuals and families about the life-changing impact of the services we provide, and we are submitting impact statements to illustrate this further. But it's also important to highlight the role that our staff play in these successes. Our mission across all Morrison Center programs is to help individuals live their lives to their fullest potential. For some, this means helping them set and achieve personal goals; for others, it means supporting them in connecting with the world around them and experiencing the joy of being valued members of the community.

Morrison Center was founded in 1954, and since then, we've grown to support individuals across the state. We provide essential services through MaineCare Sections 13, 20, 21, 28, 29 and 65 serving individuals across all Maine counties. The services we offer have far-reaching benefits, enabling individuals to find purpose, develop friendships, and lead fulfilling lives - goals that might seem small but are, in fact, life-changing.

For example, one of our managers shared a story of a client who is a gifted artist. With support, this individual has been able to display and sell her art at local galleries and craft fairs, turning a passion into a source of income. Another manager shared stories about a client who arrived with limited social skills and challenging behaviors. Over time, this individual has developed friendships, participates in volunteer work, and no longer exhibits the unsafe behaviors that once kept him from engaging with others.

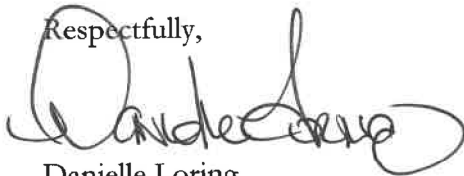
Another client who began receiving services with us in 2019 had a history of aggressive behaviors. With consistent support and advocacy, this individual has not only maintained stable housing but has a job and multiple close-knit relationships - things that seemed impossible just a few years ago.

These stories might not make headlines, but they are profound victories in the lives of the individuals we serve. These successes - these "small victories" that change people's lives - are only possible because of the support provided by dedicated staff and sufficient funding. If we are to continue expanding our reach and helping more individuals who desperately need our services, we must ensure that we can sustain our operations, and the restoration of the COLA is essential to that goal.

In closing, we ask for your support in restoring the MaineCare COLA in the supplemental budget. This adjustment will help ensure that we can continue to provide the highest level of care to those who rely on us, while also helping to retain and attract the dedicated staff who make that care possible.

Thank you for your time, your consideration, and your commitment to the people of Maine. Please feel free to reach out with any questions or for further discussion.

Respectfully,



Danielle Loring  
Executive Director, Morrison Center  
[dloring@morrison-maine.org](mailto:dloring@morrison-maine.org)

To whom it may concern at the Office of MaineCare Services,

I am writing to wholeheartedly recommend the Morrison Center for their case management services and to endorse case management services as effective intervention. Morrison Center's dedication and commitment to advocacy on behalf of my children, have made a profound difference in our lives and have provided invaluable support to our family as a whole.

As a mother of three, with two children requiring special needs services, the challenges of managing daily responsibilities and navigating medical and educational systems can often feel overwhelming. However, our case manager, Kayla, from the Morrison Center has been an integral part of our support team, offering not only practical assistance but also compassion and understanding.

Through her expertise and guidance, we have been able to access crucial resources, services, and opportunities that have significantly improved our quality of life.

The thought of facing additional barriers to accessing case management services or a longer wait to access services is deeply concerning. Without this essential support, families like mine would face significant challenges in securing necessary resources, navigating complex systems, and ensuring our children receive the care and opportunities they deserve. The absence of these services would not only increase stress and emotional strain but could also result in missed opportunities for crucial interventions and support.

The value of case management services cannot be overstated. I am very grateful for their impact on our lives and wholeheartedly recommend their services to any family in need of dedicated and compassionate support.

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a mother of a child who has needed mental health care from the end of 2022 to present. My child has been in and out of crisis units, hospitals, and day treatment programs. As a mother of a child who has such needs for her mental health, I could not have coordinated services without the help of my case manager. In an already overloaded and waitlisted system in regard to residential treatments and crises units, my case manager has been a saving grace from physically being there for us in the time of need, as well coordinating all services from in home counselors to any needs for myself as her parent. If I didn't have my case manager, I would have surely not known where to go for the vast amount of avenues provided by my case manager's ability to seek out these services, and put in referrals. It also allowed myself to focus solely on being there for my daughter, while still being able to work, without the worry of where to begin on finding services that were needed.

These case managers, BHP's, DSP's, SLO's, and CCM's show how truly committed they are to their work, ensuring families don't have to have all the stress that is added to an already unsurmountable need for mental health care. I don't know what I would have done without someone in my corner to help me find these services that are so greatly needed for my child. If Mainecare takes away these services, it would be a detrimental wave to the mental health community, and to parents who at times feel absolutely lost within the system. Parents who are new to the navigation of mental health, would not be able to find services on their own, and would surely be at a loss of how to help their child in a time of dire need while the children are growing and developing coping mechanisms and emotional regulation.

Their dedication to not only the task at hand, but their dedication to see a family succeed, far surmounts any cost. I am forever indebted to the care that has been provided for my child, and that is all thanks to the services provided for my case manager to do her job.

1/9/2025

To: OMS office of MaineCare Services

From: parents and shared living providers to their 34 year old adult disabled daughter

On behalf of the many affected providers, families and consumers by the budget constraints eliminating COLA increases, please consider the following detrimental impacts. Currently, in addition to the shared living program, our daughter attends an amazing community program, Spindleworks. It took years to find this program fit and together with the shared living program she has made great strides in behavior, social and life skill improvements.

What is troubling is the inability of these vitally important providers to attract DSP's and service providers, much less retain them. With such low pay rates and now, no COLA increases, the problem is exacerbated. For example, in the 2.5 years of providing shared living services we have had (3) coordinators. Fortunately, we were always covered by dedicated staff who stepped in for support. How long can this last?

We implore you to consider the aforementioned issues and make every effort to convince the legislature for required funding. With inflation and housing costs reaching record levels, workers are being forced out of this profession by financial necessity. It has to change before "all the wheels come off the bus." In addition to the COLA restoration it is imperative to restructure (RAISE) provider rates to reflect the realities of the present day labor market.

Thank you for your time and consideration.