

Testimony of Andrew Taranko on January 23, 2025

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

Good day, 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 Andrew Taranko. I am the State Director for Living Innovations, a service of Mosaic.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony to the Committee on the supplemental budget.

I am here today to ask for your support to restore and allocate the funding needed for January 1, 2025, MaineCare service rate cost of living adjustments (COLA) 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.*

I am deeply concerned about the recent budgetary suspension of the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for MaineCare rates. This decision impacts working Mainers and every community in Maine, not to mention those who receive these essential services. This IS a direct care worker issue. The suspension of the COLA puts all of Maine's vital service system at significant risk! Our three hundred (300) employees are holding together a fragile ecosystem of vulnerable Mainers, their families and all the communities in Maine.

Living Innovations is a non-profit serving children and adults with developmental disabilities and autism in their homes and communities across all sixteen (16) counties in Maine. Living Innovations staff support over 1200 Mainers (MaineCare Members) to live their best lives every day. We provide services funded through the following MaineCare Sections: 21, 29, 28, 20 and 13. All of these services are directly impacted by withholding the January 1st, 2025 COLA.

Whether we would like to admit it, funding for these services is directly tied to the (administrative) expectations that the Department of Health and Human Services sets for organizations who provide these services. Withholding funding and maintaining the same set of administrative responsibilities puts further undue stress on the organizations that are here to serve the people of Maine.

The mention of funding cuts brings our employees to an all too familiar place of choice to remain in the caregiving field. The unintended consequences are a return to crisis for the direct care worker system of supports for all Mainers.

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.

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