

**Testimony of Beth White  
Maine Service Employees Association, SEIU Local 1989**

**On 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 (Emergency) (Governor's Bill)  
Sponsored by Representative Drew Gattine**

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and  
the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services  
1pm Thursday, January 23, 2025, State House Room 228 and Electronically**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine and members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, I'm Beth White, Director of Politics & Legislation for the Maine Service Employees Association, Local 1989 of the Service Employees International Union. We are a labor union representing over 13,000 Maine workers, including workers at Independence Advocates of Maine (IAM).

First, we support many provisions of the Governor's supplemental budget proposal, including the numerous reclassifications, reorganizations, and range changes for Executive Branch and Judicial employees. We are also here today to urge you to restore and allocate funding in the supplemental budget for the January 1, 2025, cost of living (COLA) adjustments to MaineCare service rates.

Our union includes the workers at the Treats Falls House in Orono and the Community Programs, Northern Division, of Patten and Island Falls. Our members at Treats Falls House, an Intermediate Care Facility for individuals with intellectual disabilities, provide residential nursing care for individuals with medical and/or behavioral needs. They support individuals with daily living skills, 24/7 nursing care, medical care, social services, leisure and recreation, behavioral support, and community inclusion. Our members within the Northern Division work in group homes in Island Falls and Patten, providing individuals with support in personal development and well-being, protective oversight, and supervision based on an individual's needs.

These workers are doing critically important work providing day to day care for some of Maine's most vulnerable citizens, and they are doing so for wages that are already too low, especially given the challenging nature of the work. They do this work because they care

about their fellow Mainers and they want to make a difference within their communities. Yet, instead of appreciating these workers by ensuring they earn a living wage that keeps up with inflation, the current supplemental budget proposal wants to keep wages stagnant. According to our information, the lowest paid worker we represent is making \$16.55 an hour, significantly below what MIT considers a living wage for Penobscot and Aroostook Counties (for a single adult with no children, MIT has calculated the living wage to be [\\$20.73/hour in Penobscot](#) and [\\$19.64/hour for Aroostook](#); for households with children, it is even higher). When these workers have to live paycheck to paycheck, it not only harms them and their families but it also impacts the community at large. Many of our members at IAM live in small, rural towns and spend their money at local businesses within those communities. Their wages not only support them and their own families, but they lead to spending that strengthens our local economies as well.

It is unfair and unnecessary to balance the budget on the backs of low wage workers and the vulnerable Mainers who depend on direct care workers to live their lives. If these COLA increases are rolled back, workers at these facilities will continue to suffer by falling further behind the cost of living. Our members at IAM were due to receive an additional wage increase on January 1, 2025, but due to the suspension of the COLA, those raises did not happen. They are currently working under a contract extension that contains no wage increases through the end of 2026 if these COLA cuts are not reversed. Recruitment and retention will continue to be challenges. So many of these workers already live paycheck to paycheck, and if their wages remain stagnant while inflation continues to rise, they will struggle even more. Please reverse the proposed cuts in the final version of the supplemental budget.

Thank you for your consideration, and I would be happy to take any questions.