



Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 1280 - Westbrook, ME **04098**

Street Address:

15 Saunders Way, Suite 500-G, Westbrook, ME 04092

Telephone 207-523-5170 (V/TTY) – Fax 207-854-1787

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 Ann-Marie Mayberry. I am the Executive Director of GMS.

I appreciate the opportunity to come before the Committee to provide written testimony 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 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*.

GMS employs 139 dedicated individuals and contracts with 135 Shared Living providers, delivering essential services to over 250 adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities and autism across 14 counties in Maine. Since our inception in 1981, GMS has focused on enhancing quality of life and promoting independence for those we serve, as well as for our committed staff.

A significant number of our direct care employees are relatively new to the United States, with nearly all originating from East Africa. They came to America seeking a better life, yet many work an average of 80 to 100 hours a week simply to support their families. I ask you: what kind of quality of life is that?

At GMS, we believe that fair wages are crucial for enabling our employees to sustain a single full-time job, which fosters their independence and enhances their overall quality of life. This, in turn, improves the quality of life for those we serve, as our Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) will be less exhausted and better able to respond to the needs of consumers. This situation underscores the urgent need for your commitment to fair labor practices.

I am writing to advocate for the fulfillment of the promise made during the 130th legislative session in 2021/2022 regarding the approval of the 125% minimum wage and cost-of-living adjustment (COLA)

initiative. This decision was not only a commitment to workers but also an acknowledgment of the financial challenges faced by many families in our community.

In Maine, the cost of living has risen dramatically, with average housing costs around \$300,000 for home purchases and rental prices for a two-bedroom apartment in Portland averaging approximately \$1,800 per month. Additionally, the median household income for a family of four in Maine is about \$80,000. As essential expenses such as housing, food, and healthcare continue to escalate, it is imperative that our wage policies align accordingly to ensure every worker can afford a decent standard of living.

Upholding the promise of a COLA is vital for the well-being of countless individuals and families who rely on these wages to meet their basic needs. Valuing the dignity of work through fair compensation not only supports our employees but also stimulates our local economy, enabling them to contribute more effectively to their communities.

I understand that economic fluctuations and budgetary constraints can complicate policy decisions. However, I implore you to remain steadfast in your commitment to fair wages. The promise made in 2022 is not just a number; it represents hope and stability for many individuals and families who depend on these wages.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

Ann-Marie Mayberry
Executive Director, GMS