

Debbie Dionne  
Topsham  
LD 209

Testimony of Debbie Dionne  
Topsham, Maine  
Parent of Kate Riordan  
Neither for Nor Against- LD 209 - 2025 Supplemental Budget

I am the proud mother of Kate, a 45 year old women with a lifetime diagnosis of cerebral palsy, an intellectual disability and a severe communication challenge due to her inability to speak. Kate has struggled from the moment she finally she took her first breath to achieve her version of independence and integration in the community she has lived in her entire life. Since 2002, Kate has had the privilege of living in an Independence Association group home with 5 of her long time friends. This home is funded under Section 21 of MaineCare Services. The dedication of the Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) in Kate's life cannot be overstated. Their commitment has given her the stability and care needed to exceed expectations, but the challenges in retaining such vital support are heartbreaking. The staggering number of DSPs cycling in and out of her life is a painful reminder of the critical need to address systemic issues in wages, working conditions, and recognition for these essential workers. For Kate and individuals like her, the consistency and trust built with a skilled DSP are not luxuries but necessities. Each departure represents not just a professional loss but a deeply personal one, disrupting the fragile foundation of stability and trust that takes so much time to build. So many DSPs have moved on to higher paying, less stressful jobs. At one point, and over a three year period of time, Kate had 88 DSPs funnel in and out of her life. Losing someone you trust, knows how you communicate, and how to assist you with your most personal needs is a loss that is devastating. The DSPs that continue to stay work copious hours of overtime to fill the open positions so that Kate and her housemates are safe and supported and so that these caring and compassionate direct care workers can make a living wage to support their own families.

I am deeply concerned about the recent suspension of the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for MaineCare rates. These COLAs were promised and budgeted for. How many more DSPs will be forced to leave the caregiver profession they love, because they need to provide for their own families?

The suspension of COLAs has far-reaching consequences affecting essential services to individuals with intellectual, developmental, and/or physical disabilities, those receiving behavioral health support, and older adults and the dedicated workers who provide care and support for them. As the cost of living and minimum wage rises, this decision puts Maine's critical service system at serious risk.

COLAs are required under current Maine law and have been instrumental in helping retain dedicated staff by enabling modest but meaningful wage increases. Restoring a COLA for MaineCare services is vital for ensuring our service system's integrity, sustainability, and access to services for those who need it most.

I urge you to collaborate with your fellow legislators to prioritize fairness and reinstate the essential funding needed to restore COLAs in the supplemental budget.

Thank you for your commitment to support all Mainers, including my daughter and her direct care workers.

Respectfully,

Debbie Dionne  
Mother of Kate Riordan  
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