



Testimony of Melinda Ward

LD 210 An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds, and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026, and June 30, 2027

February 12, 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 Melinda Ward, I am the President & CEO of OHI. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on the biennial budget.

I would like to ask for your support to restore and allocate the funding needed for January 1, 2025, MaineCare service rate cost of living adjustments and pending rate determinations for MaineCare services for adults with intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorder and brain injury in the biennial budget, *LD 210 An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds, and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026, and June 30, 2027*

OHI was incorporated in 1979, and we provide supports and services for over 400 adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, autism, and mental illness in six counties. We currently employ approximately 260 employees, and we have over 50 job openings.

We are concerned with the recent budgetary suspension of the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for MaineCare rates. This decision impacts those we support and our staff. We made the decision to push our organization into further deficit, by giving a 2.5% COLA to staff as of 12/30/24. Retaining our Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) is necessary for continuing to serve the State's most vulnerable people. Being able to reach the 92.5% staffing requirement is nearly impossible with as many job openings as we have. Yes, we use overtime and supervisor time, to meet the State's requirements as best as we can. Realizing that is not sustainable, we gave a 2.5% and adjusted the base wage of our DSPs.

We rely on a reasonable rate of reimbursement and for the State to keep its promise of the COLA. The increased minimum wage and general cost of living increases put our supports and services at risk. We do not have the capacity to provide expanded or new services, even though we want to.

Please restore funding for annual COLAs and pending rate determinations for adult IDD/BI services in the biennial budget.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony. Please contact me with any questions you may have.

Melinda Ward, SPHR

President and CEO

OHI

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