

OHI

203 Main Ave

Bangor, ME 04401

February 11, 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 Lindy Cockburn, I am the CSS at OHI and I reside in Bangor Maine. I appreciate the opportunity to come before the Committee to provide testimony on the biennial budget. I am here today to ask for you to restore and allocate funding for cost of living adjustments for MaineCare services in the biennial budget, LD 210.

I am writing to ask for your support to increase funding for Direct Support Professionals to help reduce a major workforce crisis. Every day over 20,000 Direct Support Professionals perform important work that empowers people with disabilities to live a good life. We support clients in homes, community sites, and businesses, but are underpaid for the invaluable work we do that makes it possible for people with disabilities to live, learn, and earn in the community.

OHI and all other disability service providers are crippled by workforce shortages. Low pay, due to lagging Medicaid reimbursements, creates challenges with recruiting and retaining adequate numbers of direct support staff. People with disabilities depend on us and their quality of life is negatively impacted by staffing shortages, high turnover, and burn-out.

For over 40 years, OHI has provided opportunities and experiences in employment, lifelong learning, community living, and achieving positive emotional health to more 1500 than people with developmental disabilities annually. Unfortunately, many of OHI Direct Support Professionals struggle financially and depend on public assistance. Furthermore, there is tremendous stress to cover workforce shortages of up to 20%, which causes burn-out and a continual cycle of turnover.

At this time I am a new Widow and have never needed public assistance but I do now. I am so sad by this reality. I want to be able to care for myself without assistance. A pay raise

alone would help me pay my mortgage. I am at risk of losing my home. I have come to the point where I need to be visiting a food bank. I have to decide paycheck to paycheck which bill I will have to be late on to accommodate basic living expenses water, gas, electric and food. I believe that helping support people with disabilities is my niche and I am truly wondering what life looks like for people with disabilities if we don't address this situation immediately. It would have a domino effect and create issues somewhere else on another end of things. Thank you for taking the time to review my concerns about this important issue. I am counting on you to address the word with developmental disabilities.

Sincerely,

Lindy Cockburn