

February 11, 2025

To Whom it May Concern,

My name is Lianne Lewin-Grover and I'm a Program Coordinator at Creative Trails, the community support programming of Support Solutions that provides MaineCare Waiver Services to 140 individuals throughout our 5 locations. I'd like to thank the Legislature and State of Maine for the work that's been done to protect MaineCare and to maintain a transparent rate setting process. I understand the uncertainty at the federal level adds an extra layer of difficulty in forecasting for the next two years. I appreciate your time to review my testimony.

I'm writing to advocate for the restoration of Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLAs) to MaineCare reimbursement service rates, for appropriate sufficient funds allocated to restore the MaineCare COLAs and pending rate determinations, and to reject changes to Section UU and the MaineCare Rate Setting System.

The proposed budget destabilizes an already fragile system. MaineCare is how we pay for the critical services that ensure individuals with disabilities receive the consistent, quality, and specialized care they need to access the community and lead the most independent lives possible. The budget represents a step backward, not forward. The State, the Legislature, and stakeholders have been working hard over the past several years to grow this workforce, and it's been paying off. COLAs have been a lifeline, but the progress is fragile and we need to be persistent and committed to building an effective and sustainable system.

COLAs are imperative to be able to increase staff pay rates, which is necessary to be able to maintain an adequate workforce. It took me three months to fill my most recent staff position, as the vast majority of candidates were unable to accept the rate of pay that current reimbursement rates are currently able to sustain. Suspending MaineCare COLAs amounts to more than half of the cuts proposed in the Governor's biennial budget. These proposed cuts reverse the investments lawmakers have made in recent years to grow the workforce, which directly threatens the reliability and stability of care services for the Maine people who rely on them. The proposed cuts are short sighted and fail to uphold Maine's commitment to taking care of our most vulnerable residents by strengthening this essential workforce and our state economy.

This budget would take us in the opposite direction we need to go; we look forward to Speaker Fecteau's proposal to raise the wages of direct care professionals and to Representative Holly Stover's proposal to support the pending rate determination for HCBS services.

The suggested language change in Section UU, combined with insufficient funding in the MaineCare budget to implement the award-winning Rate Setting System and scheduled COLAs, and undermines the modest but critical progress we've made. We cannot afford to move backward.

We urge the Legislature to maintain the policies already in motion, and to budget sufficiently to retain our workforce and maintain access to services for the thousands of individuals with disability that rely on MaineCare Waiver Service providers each day for support. We must ensure that MaineCare IDD/BI services are accessible and responsive to the growing needs of our communities.

Sincerely,

Lianne Lewin-Grover
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