



*Incorporated in 1967*

Testimony of Rob Moran, Executive Director, Community Living Association, Houlton Maine

LD 210 An act making Unified Appropriations and for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and other Funds, and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operation of State Government for the Fiscal Years ending June 30, 2025, and June 30, 2026, and June 30, 2027.

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 Rob Moran. I am the Executive Director of Community Living Association in Houlton.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony to the Committee on the biennial budget.

I am submitting testimony to ask for your support to restore and allocate the funding needed for January 1, 2025, Maine Care service rate cost of living adjustments and rate determinations for Maine Care Services for adults with IDD, Autism, and Brain Injury in the biennial budget, LD 210 An act making Unified Appropriations and for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and other Funds, and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operation of State Government for the Fiscal Years ending June 30, 2025, and June 30, 2026, and June 30, 2027.

I oppose the changes in the budget which make COLA's and rate determinations dependent on available funding. These changes would hurt the progress we've made in getting the system into a semi-stable place. Agencies cannot sustain services unless they are able to pay staff a competitive wage. No COLA's has a huge impact on this as you've all heard. The work of A Direct Support Professional (DSP) is difficult, and they should be compensated as such.

Community Living Association in Houlton is an agency that was started in 1967 that serves people with disabilities. We provide Waiver residential facilities, ICF nursing beds, Community Supports, Work Supports, Shared Living, and Supported Community Living. Community Living Association employs upwards of 180 employees and serves over 300 people from Bangor to Fort Kent.

For Community Living Association specifically, when we heard there would not be a COLA, we decided to stop any plans of potentially expanding our number of Residential Waiver Homes. The main reason we were thinking about adding a home was that we're doing better staffing-wise than we have in a long time. We were in the early stages of considering adding a home. These homes are sorely needed here in the county. All the large agencies (Northern Maine General, Danforth Habilitations, Central Aroostook Association, and us) have reduced homes and or bed capacity significantly in the last few years. In most cases, this is due to the staffing crisis.

Administrative offices: 18 Military Street, Houlton, Maine 04730  
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There have been times when residents have had to move to southern Maine due to their homes closing. Imagine being a person with disabilities having to move from one end of the state to the other due to an agency having to close a home due to a staffing shortage. This has happened. The decision not to fund a COLA makes it more likely that additional Aroostook homes close. This would make that scenario more likely.

The lack of a COLA also means increased competition from retail and food businesses for employees. It means that our starting wage increases by a much smaller amount. Both of these business types can raise the price of their goods, in order to raise wages and stay well-staffed without losing profit. CLA and agencies like ours are completely dependent on rates as you all know.

At CLA, we are planning on still doing some type of raise for our front-line caregivers. Whatever we do will be less than it would be with a COLA that was funded. All our costs have increased during the past year, like every other business in the state. The difference is, as I mentioned before, most of them can raise their prices. In Houlton, it's very competitive for staff. The work a caregiver does is much more difficult, as you all know. Personal care, giving medications, and dealing with difficult behaviors are all part of the work life of a Direct Support Professional along with many other challenges including an ever-increasing/changing certification process.

***Please restore the COLA for all Maine Care rates in the Biennial budget.***

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

Rob Moran  
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