



Testimony of Velia Janerico-Matthews, resident of Skowhegan, ME

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.

I am writing this letter to express my concerns over the Governor's biennial budget and the fact that it does not include any form of cost of living raises (COLAs) for the next two years. While these lack of raises may seem insignificant to some, I can assure you, that they can have a significant impact on those of us who dedicate over the average 40 hours to our work. It is important to acknowledge that our current economy is not one that people live in with ease. It presents many challenges for many workers as they strive to maintain their standard of living in the face of rising inflation. In the past, a wage of \$16 dollars per hour was considered fair and sufficient for basic needs, but the current economic climate has led to the realization that this amount does not adequately cover living expenses.

I work in a field where people rely on me daily for support. I assist individuals in achieving independence, provide transportation, offer personal care, and support goal setting and achievement. Every day, they rely on me to be their advocate, to be a beacon of support and someone they can always count on. And it's not just me they rely on, but the entire staff of the company I work for.

However, we have encountered a challenge in our efforts to maintain a sufficient staff. It is unfortunate that individuals are not applying to join our team, and those who do join often do not remain with us for an extended period. I believe this is not due to any shortcomings on our part, but rather, I feel, it may be due to the competitive nature of the wages offered by other companies in the area. This has led to a situation where we do not have enough staff to adequately support those who depend on us, which has created another challenge. We are experiencing a significant workload, with one person often working the hours of two or even three people.

Personally, my workweek typically spans an average of 70 hours, and on occasion, it can approach 90 hours in a single week. This is partly due to the ongoing staffing challenges, and



partly because I need overtime to cover my financial expenses. I would like to emphasize that I live by myself and support only myself. I am doing my best to make ends meet. But what of those who support others? If a person supporting solely themselves is struggling, do you not think it is important to consider the challenges faced by those who have children and are the primary breadwinners, especially those in low-income brackets? It is crucial to acknowledge the difficulties faced by single mothers/fathers who are striving to make ends meet on a meager income, with daycare expenses often consuming a significant portion of their earnings. It is essential for us as a community to recognize that the current economic climate is not conducive to denying raises by eliminating the COLA for the next two years.

It is equally essential to recognize the impact of this situation on employees and those who rely on our support. The approval of raises would be a significant step in addressing these concerns and creating a more equitable environment for all.

I would like to end this letter with a quote; "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek." -Jane Goodall

I urge you to appropriate the necessary funding for annual MaineCare COLAs in the biennial budget.

Respectfully Submitted,

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