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Hello,

I am writing about the essential need to make sure that Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs) are included in the budget.

It is essential that the cost of living adjustment (COLA) is included in the budget. If not our already fragile and underfunded service system will be at risk.

Staffing continues to be at a fragile level and without the COLA the system will be in jeopardy for collapsing.

There was a promised COLA that was supposed to go into effect on 1/1/25, but this was not followed through on. Without funding for the COLA going forward, wages for direct care staff will be close to minimal wage. It is challenging to maintain quality staffing, especially given the shortage, and the cost of continuously onboarding and training new employees may also take a toll on organizations that service multiple support personnel who are vital to the health and wellbeing of the clients they serve.

These funds are needed for agencies to continue to provide care for some of Maine's most vulnerable and without it, secondary cost increases for other medical and health services will likely result. Funding the COLA provides a lifeline and prevents people from having to rely on more costly services (I.e. ambulance, hospital, emergency services).