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February 11, 2025

Re: LD 210, An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government 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

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services, my name is Cullen Ryan, and I am the Executive Director of Community Housing of Maine or CHOM. I am also the parent of a 28-year-old son with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (ID/DD). I serve as Chair of the Maine Coalition for Housing and Quality Services, a coalition of some 4000 people, consisting primarily of parents, that focuses on housing and quality services for people with ID/DD. I also serve as chair of the Maine Developmental Services Oversight and Advisory Board (MDSOAB).

I am testifying in opposition to the portions of the Biennial Budget pertaining to MaineCare rate setting, specifically language that suspends COLAs for the next two years and stipulates that rate adjustments are subject to available appropriations.

Direct support professionals (DSPs) are the nexus of the system of care for people with intellectual/developmental disabilities (ID/DD). DSPs are essential for this population to safely participate in activities of daily living, be included as part of the community, and live fulfilling, enriched lives in which they can thrive with the smallest amount of support. Despite DSPs being critical to our system of care, there has been a chronic issue with being able to hire and retain staff, as evidenced by the fact that there are staffing issues all over the state.

Choosing this time to walk back Maine's commitment to DSPs will only serve to exacerbate this workforce crisis. It will also work to undermine the codified rate setting system that self-advocates, providers, stakeholders, family members, and the Department worked for years to implement.

The codified rate-setting system was intended to professionalize DSP wages to incentivize people to get into and stay in this field of work.

Now is not the time to move backwards.

Please oppose these Budget Initiatives and instead invest in our direct support professional staff by fully funding Maine's codified rate-setting system.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.