

Kim McLaughlin
Independence Advocates Of Maine
LD 210

Date: February 12th, 2025

Presented by: Kim McLaughlin

To: Joint Standing Committees on Appropriation and Financial Affairs Committee & Health and Human Services Committee

Subject: Testimony for the AFA/HHS Legislative Committee FY26-FY27 Budget Hearings-- 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 6/30/25, 6/30/26, and 6/30/27

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 Committee members:

My name is Kim McLaughlin, and I live in Dyer Brook, Maine. I have supported individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities for 26 years. I am currently employed by Independence Advocates of Maine, focusing on employment services. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on the biennial budget. Today, I request the restoration and allocation of funding for cost-of-living adjustments for MaineCare services in the biennial budget, LD 210.

In my role, I assist individuals with all areas of daily living, but most of my focus is on 1:1 employment services and offering opportunities for meaningful social interactions. My greatest joy comes from seeing individuals achieve work and personal goals. They have a joy that radiates over things many take for granted. We currently serve 2 individuals who have started their own business, in addition to many maintaining employment with local businesses. One of our small business owners has a long-standing job as a janitor because she felt it was something she knew how to do. Staff helped her realize she was capable of more; she began to want more. This young lady planned and started her own dog walking business. She has gained self-confidence and found joy in helping others. Every aspect of her life has been affected because of her achievement. I share this story for a couple of reasons.

First, to give you a small picture of the difference programs like IAM make every day. Every aspect of what we do makes lives better and more meaningful for those we serve. Success stories such as this will slowly start to diminish if agencies do not have staff to provide 1:1 client driven interaction. Agencies across the state are struggling to support group interactions let alone individual services. We simply cannot survive or provide the quality care that we pride ourselves in if we cannot compete with other workforces.

Secondly, I feel the lack of staff is directly related to ongoing COLA problems in this field. I am of great concern for providers having to cut services should the biennial COLA be cut. Many staff in this field are long-term staff who are at the age when they are starting to retire and take on roles that are less physically demanding. New hires have a high turnover rate because many of them report that they can find jobs that require less responsibility with equal or greater wages. Staff report that due to the turnover they are working extra hours, causing work fatigue and affecting time with their loved ones. A yearly COLA is one of the ways agencies can express value. If we cannot retain staff, my biggest fear of all is what will happen to a population who depend on us so much?

Please restore MaineCare COLAs in the biennial budget. Thank you for considering my testimony. I am available to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Kim McLaughlin
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