

Testimony Shawna Ferris

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

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

February 13, 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.

My name is Shawna Ferris. I am an QIDPA, at OHI, and I reside in Mattawamkeag.

I appreciate the opportunity to come before the Committee to provide testimony on the biennial budget.

I am here today to ask you to restore and allocate funding for cost-of-living adjustments for Maine Care services in the biennial budget, LD 210.

- I have worked for OHI for 14 years in many different capacities.
- The reason I work in this field is for the people we support. They need consistency in the staff who work with them daily. I love to watch the growth and know that I can help a little with that. It is very rewarding.

I'm deeply concerned about the suspension of the cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for Maine Care rates.

- This will make affording gas to come to and from work harder. I will have to make choices of going to work or taking my family places.
- With the cost of food, heating oil, gas, and many other utilities going up, the money to keep my family at the basics is very challenging. It has forced me to make tough decisions on what my children can do outside of school.
- If staff have to leave to go to a different workplace this is detrimental to the people we support. They need consistent staff. The unknown to them is scary and can create unneeded anxiety that can lead to extreme and harmful behaviors. Building trust in your staff and then having them leave because they must make more money to take care of their own family is devastating to the people we support.
- I will continue working in this field due to my passion and the relationships I have built. The PEOPLE we SUPPORT NEED a VOICE and I will be the voice as long as I can!
- I may have to work a second job on the weekends to help my family with the basics.
- As of right now I am picking up extra hours on the weekends within the company to help offset the increase in fuel and gas and food. Eggs are \$10.00 a dozen. How do I feed my family of five health food when a staple item in a home is \$10. That is only 1 meal for my family.

There is a person that I support that has a very hard time trusting new DSP's. It takes them a while to be to the point that they will let you help them with their hygiene or food. Once they trust you the relationship is strong for them. They had DSP staff that were very consistent for a long time. The persons challenging behaviors had decreased so much that the Behavior plan for them was close to be being decreased. Then their DSP staff had to leave due to the increase in living expenses. Rent was increased for them, on top of gas and car repairs going up. This has led to a major increase in the person supported challenging behavior. These behaviors have made the staffing pattern increase as well as the potential for people getting hurt is higher. Which leads to the need of more DSP's. DSPs right now are not putting in applications because of the rate of pay

This is a situation that affects everyone that works in this field as well as needs the staff! How would you all feel if this was your loved one that was losing their staff that have been with them for years. All because of cost-of-living expenses.

This is something that you can do to help change the lives of the people we support with more security for them. It will also help the staff be able to come to work and do an amazing job supporting them and not have to worry about putting food on the table for their own families or even heat in their homes. (This one rings so true for me as I had to buy fuel in a 5 gallon bucket this last week because I could not pick up the overtime, I needed to be at home, due to my daughter needing me to be at an event.

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

Shawna Ferris

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