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*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

Chairpersons, esteemed members of the committee, and fellow stakeholders,

My name is Ann-Marie Mayberry, and I serve as the Executive Director of GMS. I appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony on the Biennial Budget and to advocate for essential funding measures that will directly impact individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and autism in Maine.

I am here today to ask for your support on three critical priorities:

- **Restoring Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLAs) to MaineCare reimbursement service rates**
- **Appropriating sufficient funds to uphold MaineCare COLAs and pending rate determinations**
- **Rejecting proposed changes to Section UU and the MaineCare rate-setting system**

GMS employs 140 dedicated professionals and contracts with 135 Shared Living providers, delivering essential services to over 250 adults with IDD and autism across 14 counties in Maine. Since our founding in 1981, our mission has been to enhance the quality of life and promote independence for the individuals we serve, while ensuring fair and sustainable employment for our staff.

A substantial number of our direct care employees are immigrants, with nearly all coming from East Africa. They arrived in the United States in pursuit of a better life, yet many find themselves working 80 to 100 hours a week just to support their families. I ask you: what kind of quality of life is that?

At GMS, we firmly believe that fair wages are fundamental to sustaining a stable workforce. Ensuring our employees can rely on a single full-time job enables them to achieve financial stability and improves their overall well-being. In turn, this directly enhances the quality of care we provide—when Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) are not overworked and financially stressed, they can better serve individuals with disabilities who rely on their support.

We recognize and appreciate the efforts of the Legislature and the State in safeguarding MaineCare and fostering a transparent rate-setting process. We also acknowledge the challenges posed by

federal uncertainties, making state-level financial planning even more complex. However, we have worked too hard (state officials, legislators, and stakeholders alike) to expand and stabilize this workforce, only to risk its collapse by failing to support the COLA in the Biennial Budget and enacting harmful language changes in Section UU.

COLAs have been a lifeline for GMS. The Governor's proposed budget would move us in the wrong direction. Instead, we strongly support Speaker Fecteau's proposal to increase the wages of direct care professionals and Representative Holly Stover's proposal to uphold pending rate determinations for Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS).

We urge the Legislature to maintain current policies and allocate sufficient funding to protect our workforce and preserve access to essential services for thousands of individuals with disabilities. A commitment to the COLA is a commitment to the well-being of countless families who depend on these wages for their basic needs. Recognizing the dignity of work through fair compensation not only benefits our employees but also strengthens local economies and communities.

The cost of living in Maine has surged dramatically. The average home now costs approximately \$300,000, while rental prices for a two-bedroom apartment in Portland average \$1,800 per month. The median household income for a family of four stands at around \$80,000, yet rising costs for housing, food, and healthcare continue to place financial strain on working families. Our wage policies must reflect these economic realities to ensure that every worker can afford a decent standard of living.

We must ensure that MaineCare-funded IDD and brain injury services remain accessible and responsive to the evolving needs of our communities. Investing in our workforce today means protecting the services that thousands of vulnerable Mainers rely on every day.

Thank you for your time and attention to this critical issue.

**Sincerely,**

Ann-Marie Mayberry  
Executive Director, GMS