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## Testimony of Northern Maine General

*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*

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

February 14, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Rotundo, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Gattine, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of both the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Health and Human Services Committees.

My name is Michelle Raymond. I am the Chief Executive Officer for Northern Maine General (NMG), a not for profit social services organization that has been serving individuals throughout Aroostook County for over 117 years. Our mission is to provide individuals with the highest standards of care and help all of the people we serve enjoy life to their fullest potential. Our service area covers all of Aroostook County, but predominately the northern and central areas.

I am testifying today to ask for your support **to restore and allocate the funding needed to support annual COLAs and rate adjustments for pending MaineCare HCBS rate determinations and to reject the MaineCare Rate Setting System amendments as proposed in Section UU of the Governor's Biennial Budget, LD210.**

These changes would undermine the progress made in creating a fair and transparent rate-setting system—one that ensures agencies can sustain services for our state and the thousands of Mainers who rely on them every day. The suspension of COLA puts Maine's vital service system at significant risk, especially as the costs of living and minimum wage continue to rise.

NMG provides a wide range of services to approximately 250 individuals across a variety of specialized programs supported by MaineCare, such as long term care (nursing home), behavioral health, targeted case management under Section 13, and home and community supports for children and adults to include Shared Living, Group Homes, Community Supports under for people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities(IDD)/and/or Autism or Brain Injury through MaineCare Sections 18, 21, 28, and 29.

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***Our mission is to provide individuals with the highest standard of care and help all of the people we serve enjoy life to the fullest potential.***

In NMG's budgeting for this year, we relied on the legislated COLA to cover a much needed and deserved cost of living increase to further prevent turnover and to improve recruitment efforts. In anticipation of the increase, NMG already released those wage increases to its employees. Like other providers around the State, NMG has been operating several of the programs impacted, at a loss in anticipation of the expected rate determination, setting, and reform, to catch up, so we can continue to provide the necessary services to Mainers. The removal of the COLA and/or the revision being presented in Section UU of the budget and rate setting system, will simply throw away all the hard work, collaboration, and progress made between Maine's stakeholders in the last few years. Having to keep returning to the legislature to beg for money already legislated has become demoralizing for myself and our team and simply jeopardizes the reliability of direct care services.

Current MaineCare rates for our services are outdated and have not undergone a transparent rate study process leading to new rates in over a decade. MaineCare rate determination was initiated at the end of 2023, yet new rates have yet to be released and/or implemented. In fact, we have been waiting for the proposed rates to come out for public comment, along with the Department's launch of the new Lifespan Waiver in FY26, only to be told that there would be no funding in the budget to support either of them. Removing the COLAs and not proceeding with implementing updated rates creates unreliability in the system for those needing the service and for those providing the service.

NMG has been completing internal program viability reviews, resulting in the closure of some programs and we anticipate closing more, putting more Mainers back on waitlists and employees out of work. Once the already stretched workforce leaves this industry, the likelihood of getting them back into the field is reduced. So this will also likely lower the direct support market and further strain the system.

I would like to thank the Department and the Legislative body for the work done to protect MaineCare services for Mainers and to provide a transparent rate setting process. While I understand there is uncertainty at the Federal level that adds more complexity in budget planning over the next two years, I ask once again that you uphold the commitment made to appropriate funding for annual MaineCare COLAs and any pending rate determinations for HCBS services, to include Brain Injury services, into the biennial budget. In addition, I strongly encourage and ask that you reject changes to Section UU and the MaineCare Rate Setting System.

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

Respectfully,

Michelle Raymond, CEO  
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Town of Eagle Lake

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