



February 23rd

Joint Standing Committees on Appropriation and Financial Affairs

Re: 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.

Chair Rotundo, Chair Gattine, Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs:

My name is Carrie Woodcock and I am the Executive Director for Maine Parent Federation (MPF) and the parent of two children with different abilities. MPF is Maine's federally funded Parent Training and Information Center and Family-to-Family Health Information Center. We provide training and individual assistance to families of children with different abilities (especially to underserved populations) to increase awareness and access to all systems of care and increase positive outcomes.

I am testifying today against the proposed reductions/cuts to funding in LD 210 related to Cost of Living Adjustments (COLA) to direct service providers of developmental disability and mental health services¹, Head Start programming², Childcare subsidies³, and SNAP/TANF benefits⁴. Each of these services provide direct assistance to families of children with different abilities. Individually if implemented these cuts would increase an already challenging landscape for these families, Cumulatively these cuts are devastating and disproportionately impact one of Maine's most vulnerable populations.

Currently in our state MPF is hearing directly from families who have been and continue to be on waitlists for systems which utilize direct service providers. These waitlists are sometimes years long and are a barrier to integral services that when implemented increase the individual's ability to be less dependent on systems of care. Personally, as a parent of a 17-year-old with Down Syndrome who has been approved for adult case management I have been unsuccessful in accessing this service. After weeks and hours of phone calls and messages, IF my phone call is returned, it is to let me know they are not even taking referrals. This has left me with no choice but to attempt to navigate the paperwork on my own for my daughter to be considered

¹ Defund COLA to reimburse direct care service providers at at least 125% of minimum wage

² Reduction in funding of \$3.6 million

³ Reduction in funding of \$15 million

⁴ Repealing the unemployment hardship exception

for and added to the adult waiver waitlists. As somebody who works within this industry this has been challenging for me to complete, think about families who are not as connected as I am. Our state is currently in a workforce shortage crisis, if the promised COLAs are rescinded this problem will get worse.

Head Start programming is one of the most accessible, inclusive, and impactful early intervention programs for Maine's younger populations with different abilities. Twenty-five percent of their student population is children with different abilities. We are hearing from our public schools that due to a lack of Early Intervention services in Maine the behaviors and Special Education identification rates for our 5-year-olds entering Kindergarten is significantly high. Additionally, Head Start is proving to be an integral partner with our local school districts in the transition of early intervention services for 3-5-year-olds with different abilities to public schools. If Head Start is forced to close classrooms our already fragile early intervention services will be devastated.

Finally, subsidies for childcare and SNAP/TANF benefits are a lifeline for families of children with different abilities. The underserved populations MPF works with are largely one-income households which is not unusual when you have a child with a different ability. These benefits are essential to their survival and enables them to feed their families, stay warm in the winter, maintain their employment, all while attempting to foster growth in their child with a different ability.

As you can see every single one of these reductions/cuts disproportionately impact families of children with disabilities, no doubt one of the most vulnerable populations in our state. I ask that the committee please reconsider these proposals in LD 210 and support children with different abilities.

Thank you.

Carrie Woodcock
Executive Director
Maine Parent Federation