

Debbie Dionne
Topsham
LD 210

TESTIMONY REGARDING 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 Appropriations and Financial Affairs
& Health and Human Services

I oppose the changes in Parts UU-2 and UU-3 of the budget, which would make
COLAs and rate determinations dependent on available funding.

My name is Debbie Dionne and I live in Topsham. I am the mother and guardian of
Kate, a 45 year old woman with cerebral palsy, an intellectual disability and a newly
diagnosed seizure disorder. Kate has lived in a waiver 21 group home for the past 23
years. She relies upon the DSPs in her home to support her most personal and
complex needs 24 hours a day. Kate and her 5 housemates thrive on consistency and
the trust that is built with their staff. When someone leaves it creates a devastating
loss and an enormous void in their lives. Each housemate and the new DSP must start
all over again to build trust and establish communication. For my daughter it is most
challenging because she is also non verbal. This means she has very limited speech
and has chosen to use sign language, gestures, and and iPad to communicate.

Unfortunately in February five DSP staff stopped working in her home: one left the
agency for other work that pays more, number two was promoted to another group
home to become the house manager, a third was moved to another group home that
was more desperate for staff, the fourth is out on maternity leave, and the fifth DSP
has been hospitalized and needs a kidney transplant. This means the 5 existing staff
are working exorbitant hours of expensive overtime that causes them to burn out and
relief staff are left to cover the open slots. It feels like a revolving door to Kate and to
her housemates. Despite much creative thinking from the agency to hire new staff,
the agency has 18 full time residential DSP open positions. There is no incentive to
apply for DSP positions when providers remain unable to offer competitive wages,
deepening Maine's caregiver shortage and threatening essential services. Agencies do
not set MaineCare rates—DHHS and the legislature do.

Also in February my husband and Kate's step dad was diagnosed with Parkinson's
disease. One week later I was diagnosed with breast cancer. My worst fear has now
become my reality: who will continue to advocate for my daughter and take over for
me when I die? What happens to Kate if more staff leave and and her group home
must close?

It is the final hour and without immediate action to restore the COLA in the biennial
budget and reject Part UU language that undermines the MaineCare Rate Setting
System, providers will be forced to scale back services or close, leaving vulnerable
individuals and families in crisis, like mine. I know that my family is not alone.

Please support the direct care workforce and restore the COLA and reject Part UU
language. My daughter, her housemates and staff and my family are counting on you.

Thank you for your dedication, time and consideration.

Debbie Dionne
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