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April 23, 2025

Re: LD 1509 Resolve, to Maintain Access to Home and Community-based Services for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorder or Brain Injury

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Cullen Ryan, and I am the Executive Director of Community Housing of Maine or CHOM. I am also the parent of a 28-year-old son with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (ID/DD). I serve as Chair of the Maine Coalition for Housing and Quality Services, a coalition of some 4000 people, consisting primarily of parents, that focuses on housing and quality services for people with ID/DD. I also serve as chair of the Maine Developmental Services Oversight and Advisory Board (MDSOAB).

I am testifying on behalf of CHOM in support of LD 1509 Resolve, to Maintain Access to Home and Community-based Services for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorder or Brain Injury. *This resolve directs the Department of Health and Human Services to propose and implement the rates as determined by the department's rate study begun in 2023 and carried out pursuant to the provisions of the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 22, section 3173-J for services provided by home and community-based services providers under rule Chapter 101: MaineCare Benefits Manual, Chapters II and III, Sections 18, 20, 21 and 29 to adults with intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorder or brain injury.*

I urge the Committee to support any bills which would implement the enacted rate setting system and increase the rates for HCBS, specifically rates for direct support professionals (DSPs).

The reduced rates over the past decade have made it progressively harder for providers to hire and retain direct care staff, or DSPs, the people who work with my son and others with ID/DD. DSPs are the very nexus of the system of care. Direct service professionals need to be paid enough to want to work in the field to begin with, and to stay in the field once they've begun their careers. If agencies can't hire anyone, if agencies can't retain anyone, people like my son won't receive services. Hiring and retaining essential support service staff has become increasingly more difficult as starting hourly wages at places like McDonalds and Walmart, which require far less training/credentials than DSPs, have increased dramatically amid the workforce crisis. DSPs ought to be paid a professional salary commensurate with the work expected and the training required.

Providers need to be able to keep their doors open while paying a wage high enough to accomplish this. The current rates, though improved in recent years thanks to investments by the Legislature and the Department, are not yet sustainable for providers to succeed in hiring and retaining staff, which has worsened amid the current workforce crisis. The updated rate system, codified by the Legislature with widespread support, has not been implemented. This ultimately hurts the recipients of needed services. Despite the great need, agencies can only lose money for so long before it becomes untenable to provide services. The situation has become dire for providers across the state and Maine has lost providers and homes for people to live in as a result.

LD 1509 would implement the rate increases codified by Statute, increasing the funding that providers receive so that they have the resources to compensate staff equitably. This will drastically help agencies attain and retain dedicated direct support professional staff, ensuring that people in Maine with ID/DD have access to quality, continuous, essential support services.

I believe helping everyone reach their full potential is wise. I hope that you will invest in helping people with intellectual/developmental disabilities have access to and receive the services they need.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.