

Testimony of Kathy Rickards, Brunswick, Maine in Support of LD 2117, "Resolve, Directing the Department of Health and Human Services to Amend Its Rule Chapter 101: MaineCare Benefits Manual, Chapter II, Section 21, Home and Community Benefits for Members with Intellectual Disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorder

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Kathy Rickards and as the worried, aging mother of a 45-year-old son with complex intellectual, medical, and mental health disabilities who lives successfully in a group home, I cannot stress enough how very important stable housing has been in my son's life. It has been foundational in providing him a safe space to fully participate in life as he is able. Consistent, appropriate housing has allowed him to develop trusted relationships where his Direct Support Professionals can understand his needs even though his methods of communication are unique, has resulted in fewer medication errors, has accommodated his dietary needs to maintain his health, has resulted in fewer hospitalizations and crises, and allowed greater independence because of the confidence he feels. Because of stable housing, my son is a valued volunteer at MidCoast Hunger Prevention. In the past he has delivered Meals on Wheels, worked at the local hospitals and library. None of these inclusive, community building opportunities happen without a strong housing foundation.

My son has had to move 4 times over 10 years. Each time has required several months of advance planning and incremental exposures to the new setting. LD 2117 provides the safeguards to ensure an appropriate transition, should one be required. I, and many of my fellow parents of children with disabilities, am aging, and will not always be here to advocate on his behalf. He deserves to live safely and securely in his home, as long as possible, without the threat of a hasty move that will have serious repercussions. LD 2117 is a well thought out procedure to ensure the housing security people with disabilities deserve.

Thank you for the opportunity to share,

Kathy Rickards

Brunswick, Maine

Parent of a Disabled Child

Board Member of Independence Association

Member of the Maine Essential Care and Support Workforce Partnership