

Testimony of Andrew Taranko

In Opposition to LD 2177: An Act to Update and Improve the MaineCare Reimbursement System

February 11, 2026

Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to offer written testimony in **opposition** to LD 2177.

My name is Andrew Taranko, I am the State Director for Living Innovations; a non-profit organization serving children and adults with developmental disabilities and autism in their homes and communities across all sixteen (16) counties in Maine. Living Innovations staff and home providers support over 1500 children and adults (MaineCare Members) to live their best lives every day in the Maine community that they choose. We provide community-based services like Shared Living, Home and Community Supports, Case Management and Employment Services funded through the following MaineCare Sections: 21, 29, 28, 20 and 13 and Vocational Rehabilitation.

I also serve as Board President of the Maine Association for Community Service Providers (MACSP). MACSP represents nearly one hundred agencies that deliver person-centered educational, vocational, residential, and community supports, as well as specialized services and care to a diverse population of Maine children and adults who have either intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, or brain injuries, so that they may live full and meaningful lives in the community. Our members provide HCBS services to over 5,000 adults across the state with nearly 9,000 direct support professionals (DSPs) funded by MaineCare waivers.

Over the past 14 months, the system established within MaineCare to fund ongoing cost of living adjustments (COLAs) has been eroded. We were expecting on January 1st, 2025 to have budgeted COLAs while we patiently waited for a rate study to be completed. Between then and now, we have seen COLAs be eliminated and force the legislature to step in twice and fund them partially.

This body of the three branches of government has worked tirelessly over the past decade to increase wages for the direct care workforce. That work will be eliminated by the forward movement of LD 2177. Currently Living Innovations has been able to keep up with our commitment to 125% of minimum wage for our direct care workers. Although, each year that DHHS Office of MaineCare Services does not put forward a real COLA for direct care workers' wages we lose ground on supporting essential workers here in Maine.

Cost of Living Adjustments are not a luxury; they are a necessity and require the Department or the Legislature to put forward the effort and fund them annually. The current law was set up to do just that for our direct care workforce. Allowing DHHS the free pass to eliminate a mandate

will decimate the already fragile workforce caring for our most vulnerable Maine citizens. In the meantime, what we need is for DHHS to follow the plan developed by this legislative body that allows everyone an equal understanding of when and how rates and COLAs will be implemented.

I ask for your assistance in **opposing** the concept and changes that LD 2177 would bring, along with any amendments that further erode the plan to support the care and services for people with disabilities and its workforce.

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

Sincerely,

Andrew Taranko,
Maine Director
Living Innovations, a service of Mosaic
ataranko@livinginnovations.com