

Sarah King
Westbrook
LD 2212

Testimony of Sarah King, Director of Residential Services. Residential Resources of Maine

Neither for Nor Against

LD 2122, An Act Making Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027

Joint Standing Committees on Appropriation and Financial Affairs & Health and Human Services

February 17, 2026

Senator Rotondo, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Gattine, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services Thank you for the opportunity to testify on LD 2122, the Governor's Supplemental Budget, An Act Making Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027.

My name is Sarah King, I am the Director of Residential Services for Residential Resources of Maine. We are a service provider of residential agency home supports and shared living in Maine. We support 25 individuals in residential settings and 14 individuals via shared living. Our services are provided by a professional and skilled workforce of nearly 60 staff and 12 shared living providers.

I'm writing today to ask you to allocate and fund necessary cost-of-living-adjustments (COLAs) for direct support professionals providing services to adults and children with intellectual and developmental disabilities, people with autism spectrum disorder, and brain injuries.

I want to thank members of both committees for restoring a partial COLA in last year's budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of stabilizing reimbursement rates and establishing a reliable Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) schedule for IDD services. I want to speak with you today not just about systems and rates, but about people—the individuals we support and the workforce that sustains them.

Our organization has experienced ongoing workforce shortages that rise and fall with reimbursement rates, and therefore with wages. When reimbursement lags behind real costs, we simply cannot compete for workers, and the result is stretching every staffing resource we have just to maintain safety and ensure individuals' basic needs and personal goals are met. These moments are exhausting for staff and deeply unfair to the people who rely on us. They pull our attention away from meaningful enrichment and toward crisis management.

Conversely, when reimbursement has been adequate, the difference is transformative. We can invest in professional training for Direct Support Professionals, support their growth, and build the skills necessary for long-term retention. We see turnover decrease. We see morale stabilize. We see our ability to recruit improve. But none of this is possible without adequate reimbursement and consistent COLAs that reflect the real cost of living and operating essential services.

A reliable COLA schedule would bring opportunity, relief, and stability to our entire system. Instead of worrying about cutting programs, sacrificing quality, or being unable to offer competitive wages, we could return our focus to what matters most: individual safety, meaningful enrichment, staff development, and the long-term health of our services. With predictable adjustments, we would be able to reopen programs, expand services, and—perhaps most importantly—plan realistically for the future.

The uncertainty surrounding rate setting for IDD services has deeply strained our ability to sustain operations. We must constantly be prepared for financial stress and maintain multiple contingency plans, redirecting time and attention away from service quality. The rising costs of rent, food, utilities, transportation, and basic living expenses affect not only the individuals we serve, but also the staff who support them and the organization itself. Providers have waited in good faith for the HCBS rate determinations, but without an effective date or clarity about implementation, we remain unsure whether the rates will be adopted within existing funds or delayed yet again. This uncertainty undermines responsible budgeting, hiring, retention, and program development.

For the individuals we serve, consistency is essential. For the workforce that supports them, stability determines whether they remain in this field. For organizations like ours, predictable COLAs and timely rate-setting decisions are the foundation of sustainable, high quality services. Thank you for your attention and for your commitment to ensuring that Maine's IDD community receives the stability and fairness it deserves. I urge you to support policies that allow us to shift from crisis response to meaningful, person-centered care and long-term planning for the future of our services.

The stability and consistency offered by a predictable COLA schedule is paramount to maintaining access to services for many of Maine's most vulnerable citizens. Without COLAS we are failing to keep up with the need for competitive wages. Mainers who depend on the essential supports offered by DSPs need a reliable workforce.

Please provide funding to restore COLAs for essential care and support services in the supplemental budget.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted,
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