

Testimony of Jill McKenney, Executive Director, Brighter Heights Maine and Heartleaf ABA

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

Good afternoon, 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.*

I am Jill McKenney, the Executive Director of Brighter Heights Maine and Heartleaf ABA. My agencies offer a range of Behavioral Health and Adult Residential IDD services across Maine. Our group homes support 10 adults and employ 23 DSPs.

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

I am going to be direct. I am here to voice my concerns and attempt to be the voice for those who can't speak, the vulnerable and often invisible people that are in our care for the services they need to increase their quality of life.

The COLAs for direct service professionals are written in law. Annual Cost-of-living adjustment are required for MaineCare services under Maine law 22 M.R.S.A §3173-J

Many of you, me, and hundreds of agencies impacted by not funding the COLA as required by law, have spent countless hours advocating for the law, as it is written, to be implemented. We all have the same 24 hours in a day, how we choose to utilize that time has real life consequences for the most vulnerable in our communities.

Because of lack of funding for COLA, hundreds of agencies are faced with staffing shortages that impact the health, well-being and safety of our clients. Personally, our agency had to make the heartbreaking decision to close 3 of our homes because we could no longer sustain the losses we experienced, in part because of the COLA not being fully funded.

The administration has seen fit to use our substantial rainy-day fund to provide money to certain programs. There is money to allocate, as evidenced by funding some programs.

Please provide full 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,

Jill McKenney

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