

Testimony of Christopher Allen DSP/Employment Specialist.

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

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.

My name is Christopher Allen, and I'm a Direct Support Professional and Employment Specialist in Island Falls, Maine. I've been a DSP for 12 years, and I'm here today to ask you to restore funding for needed cost-of-living adjustments in the supplemental budget.

I love this work. Supporting people in the northern part of the state so they can live full lives, be part of their communities, and feel valued has been incredibly rewarding. When wages are competitive, DSPs can stay in these roles long enough to build real relationships and provide consistent, quality support.

But this job has also become harder every year. The cost of living keeps going up, and while past COLAs helped us stay afloat, they haven't kept pace. High turnover, short staffing, and burnout are now constant challenges. DSPs are expected to do physically, emotionally, and mentally demanding work – often for wages that are lower than what fast food or convenience stores offer, with far less responsibility.

That reality pushes people away from this field, even when they want to do this kind of work. When staff leave, it's not just workers who are affected – it's the people who rely on us every day for stability, safety, and support.

COLAs aren't a bonus or a luxury. They're what allow agencies to stay staffed and services to keep running. They are the backbone of direct care services, not just here in Maine, but across the country.

I want to thank members of both committees for restoring a partial COLA in last year's budget. That support mattered, and I'm asking you to continue building on it so this essential workforce can survive and continue serving our communities.

Thank you for your time and for listening.

Respectfully Submitted,

Christopher Allen  
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