



Independence Association

Celebrating Ability Since 1966

Neither for Nor Against

2025 - 2026

LD 2212: 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

OFFICERS

Eric Uhl

TESTIMONY SUBMITTED TO: Joint Standing Committees on Appropriation and Financial Affairs & Health and Human Services

Chairperson

PUBLIC HEARING DATE: 02/17/2026

Melissa Knutson

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:

Vice Chairperson

Richard Estabrook

Secretary

My name is Brett Bulmer, and I serve as Executive Director of Independence Association, a nonprofit organization based in Brunswick that supports people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Midcoast Maine. We provide an array of residential and community supports and employ Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) who deliver hands-on care every day.

Charles Frizzle

Treasurer

I am neither for nor against LD 2212 overall. However, I respectfully urge you to include and fully fund the 3.1% Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) for Direct Support Professionals in the Supplemental Budget.

DIRECTORS

David Cowing

Under Maine law (22 M.R.S.A. §3173-J), annual cost-of-living adjustments are required for MaineCare services. For the second year in a row, however, the required COLA has not been fully included in the budget. Since being adopted as part of MaineCare Rate Reform in 2022, COLAs have been essential in helping service rates keep pace with inflation and rising labor costs, including maintaining wages at 125% of minimum wage. In a state facing a significant direct care workforce shortage and an annually increasing minimum wage, a COLA is not a luxury—it is a necessity.

Deborah Dionne

Vicki Durrell

Evan Gleason

Toni Kemmerle

In recent months, there has been increased emphasis on service quality, including the formation of OADS' Quality Improvement Coalition and the recent launch of the State's new Licensing system for providers. I appreciate that focus. But as I approach 29 years in this field—having started as a Direct Support Professional myself in 1997—my conviction has only grown stronger: **nothing impacts the quality of life for the individuals we serve more than the quality of the staff supporting them. The quality of our services will never exceed the quality of our DSPs.** Investing in them through competitive wages isn't optional, it's essential.

Christopher Ladner

Eveline McGregor

Courtney Oland

Hank Pfeifle

Kathy Rickards

Nancy Scott

We can strengthen oversight and improve systems, but without a stable, adequately compensated workforce, quality will remain fragile. When wages stagnate, turnover rises. When turnover rises, relationships are disrupted. And when relationships are disrupted, people we support experience the greatest impact.

Executive Director

Brett Bulmer

If the State is going to rely on community-based providers to deliver these essential services, it has an obligation to ensure providers have the resources necessary to recruit and retain a qualified workforce. Funding the statutorily required COLA is a critical part of that responsibility.

Mission: To support adults and children with disabilities to achieve full and inclusive lives in their chosen communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I respectfully urge you to fund the required 3.1% COLA in the Supplemental Budget.

Respectfully submitted,

Brett Bulmer, Executive Director

