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**Written Testimony of Jeffrey A. Johnson  
Vice President, Bridges Home & Community Services**

**In Opposition to LD 2212**

**To:**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine,  
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and  
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

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Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, and Honorable Committee Members:

My name is Jeffrey A. Johnson, and I serve as Vice President for Bridges Home & Community Services. I am also a resident of Manchester, Maine. I am submitting this testimony in strong opposition to LD 2212, specifically regarding its omission of funding for Cost of Living Adjustments (COLAs) tied to MaineCare reimbursement rates.

The State of Maine has worked in recent years to implement a more rational, data driven rate setting system intended to reflect the true cost of providing essential home and community based services. A critical component of that system is the incorporation of annual COLAs. These adjustments are not discretionary enhancements—they are an essential mechanism to ensure that reimbursement rates keep pace with inflation, rising labor costs, and the increasing demands on the direct care workforce.

By omitting funding for COLAs in LD 2212, the Legislature undermines the very rate setting structure it enacted. Without COLA funding, providers face immediate and compounding financial pressures that erode operational stability and diminish their ability to support the individuals who rely on these services.

This omission has direct and harmful consequences for both consumers and providers:

**1. Impact on Consumers**

When reimbursement fails to keep pace with real costs, consumers experience:

- Reduced availability of services
- Longer waitlists
- Increased turnover among staff, which disrupts continuity of care
- Greater difficulty accessing the supports they need to remain safely in their homes and communities

People receiving home and community based services often live with complex medical, behavioral, and functional needs. Their independence and quality of life depend on a stable, qualified workforce—one that cannot be sustained under stagnant reimbursement.

## **2. Impact on Providers and the Direct Care Workforce**

The most significant strain falls on the providers and direct care professionals who deliver essential daily supports.

Providers are currently competing in a labor market where wages are rising across every sector, yet reimbursement rates tied to MaineCare services remain static. Without COLAs to reflect inflationary pressures, providers cannot offer competitive wages, making it extremely difficult to recruit and retain direct care workers.

Direct care workers already earn wages far below comparable entry level positions in other sectors, despite performing work that is physically demanding, emotionally taxing, and critically important to Maine's care infrastructure. When reimbursement rates fail to support workforce sustaining wages, workers leave the field. This results in chronic staffing shortages that jeopardize provider capacity and compromise service access for vulnerable Mainers.

## **3. System Level Consequences**

The ripple effects of withholding COLA funding include:

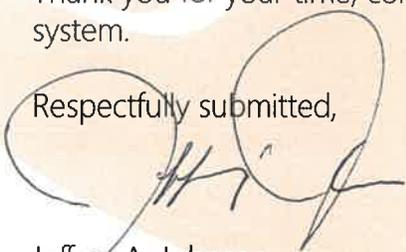
- Increased emergency service utilization
- Higher long term institutional care costs
- Reduced provider participation in MaineCare
- Greater system instability overall

Failing to fund COLAs is not a cost containment strategy; it is a cost shifting strategy—one that ultimately increases both financial burdens and human hardship across the care continuum.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Committee to restore funding for COLAs within LD 2212. This action is essential to maintain the integrity of Maine's rate setting system, ensure fair and sustainable wages for direct care workers, and preserve access to critical home and community based services for Maine residents.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and continued commitment to strengthening Maine's care system.

Respectfully submitted,



Jeffrey A. Johnson  
Vice President, Home & Community Based Services  
Resident of Manchester, Maine