

Kathy Rickards  
Brunswick  
LD 2212

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,

My name is Kathy Rickards and I am the parent of a 45 year old young man with intellectual, medical, and mental health disabilities. I am neither for nor against LD 2212 overall, but I urge you to include and fully fund the 3.1% COLA for Direct Support Professionals in the Supplemental Budget. The long-term care workforce crisis puts my son, and hundreds of other aging and disabled Maine neighbors at terrible risk. The facts are clear: over 100 group homes in Maine have closed, in my son's group home alone, he lost 33% of his DSP staff- not because they didn't care, but because they could not afford to stay. The workforce shortage isn't theoretical, it has real world consequences-higher risk of neglect, inconsistency, and trauma for people like my son. It means he may lose his group home where we thought he would age in place with 5 lifelong friends. Stagnant wages, unsustainable and non-reimbursable overtime, and a chronic lack of respect for the life saving, life sustaining work they do, have decimated an already at risk population and the people who care for them. Direct Support Professionals are the foundation of Maine's care system for people with disabilities, and our aging neighbors. They provide critical, high skill services day in and day out, yet are chronically underpaid, overworked, and under valued. You have not only a legal obligation to invest in competitive wages, you have a moral obligation. I respectfully urge you to fully fund the required 3.1% COLA in the Supplemental Budget.

Thank you for your consideration,  
Kathy Rickards

Parent of a group home resident

Independence Association Board Member

Member of the Maine Essential Care and Support Workforce Partnership