



February 26, 2026

Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
Senator Margaret Rotundo, Chair
Representative Drew Gattine, Chair
State House, Room 228
Augusta, Maine 04333

Committee on Judiciary
Senator Anne Carney, Chair
Representative Amy Kuhn, Chair
State House, Room 438
Augusta, Maine 04333

Re: 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

Dear Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of both Committees:

My name is Lauren Wille and I serve as the Legal Director at Disability Rights Maine. DRM is Maine's federally mandated Protection and Advocacy agency. Our mission is to advance justice and equality by enforcing rights and expanding opportunities for people with disabilities in Maine. We provide free legal services to Mainers with disabilities statewide.

DRM's ten attorneys provide high-quality representation to Mainers with disabilities who have experienced disability-based discrimination. We help students with disabilities access their right to appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment and with the supports they need to thrive. Requests for assistance from families whose children with disabilities are illegally excluded from school have increased. DRM's education attorneys have worked tirelessly to help children return to

160 Capitol Street, Suite 4, Augusta, ME 04330
207.626.2774 • 1.800.452.1948 • Fax: 207.621.1419 • drme.org

MAINE'S PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY AGENCY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

school after weeks, and sometimes months, of exclusion. When a student cannot go to school, the effects ripple out to the whole family, who may experience loss of employment and housing instability as a result. Our attorneys also represent disabled Mainers with issues regarding housing discrimination, discrimination in employment, adult guardianship, and accessibility in public accommodations. DRM serves thousands of Mainers with disabilities each year. The work of DRM attorneys helps ensure people with disabilities can fully engage in their communities through school, employment, and on every level available to people without disabilities.

The supplemental budget before you is crucial in ensuring that DRM and the other civil legal aid providers can maintain the level of assistance they have been able to provide. The Legislature continued previous funding by allocating \$3 million toward civil legal aid for fiscal years 2025-2026. DRM is extremely grateful for this funding, and for the allotment of \$4 million in the previous biennium. However, without continued funding, the civil legal aid providers face a substantial funding cliff that will greatly impede our ability to continue to provide the amount of assistance to individuals we have now been providing for years. Without continued funding of \$3 million for fiscal year 2026-2027, there will be an estimated 28% reduction in civil legal services among the providers. This means that thousands more Mainers will face eviction and foreclosures, school exclusion, denial of benefits, and domestic violence situations without the benefit of legal counsel. This will result in more Mainers without housing, without benefits, without education, and more. Courts will be less efficient without attorneys to shepherd cases through proceedings. Local food pantries will be strained. In-home services that service seniors and people with disabilities will be lost, driving up costs of institutional care. The decrease in civil legal aid will have widespread consequences in every area of the state and across all demographics.

For these reasons, we urge the Legislature to invest these continuing funds in civil legal aid so that DRM and the other providers can continue to help Mainers with their civil legal needs. DRM joins with all the civil legal aid providers in respectfully requesting an allocation of \$3 million dollars to the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund for fiscal year 2026-2027.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lauren Wille". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lauren Wille, Esq.
Legal Director
Disability Rights Maine