

Written Testimony for LD 258

February 24, 2023

Dear Senators Rotundo and Baldacci, Representatives Sachs and Meyer, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services:

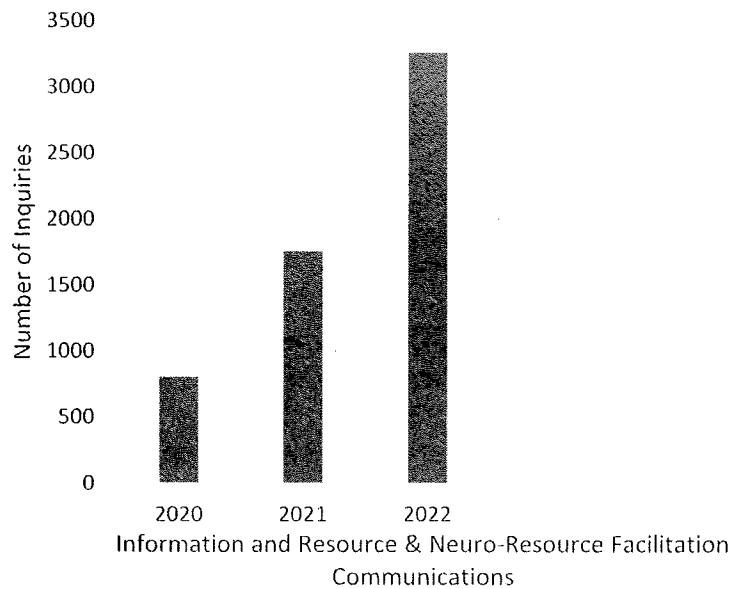
Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on behalf of the Acquired Brain Injury Advisory Council (ABIAC) regarding LD 258: *An Act To Make Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023 and June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025*. We greatly appreciate the committees' commitment to the budget process and to providing essential funding for brain injury services.

Formed in 2002 to support a grant and later established in statute, the ABIAC has been in existence to provide advice and oversight to DHHS for the last 20 years. In general, the Council is in favor of funding to support brain injury services, including the Medicaid waiver for brain injury residential and community services; brain injury neurorehabilitation services, which serve MaineCare members as well as persons with other insurances; and core supports, which are more broadly available—mostly at no cost—to both the insured and uninsured. The latter is state-contracted through the Brain Injury Association of America-Maine Chapter (BIAA-ME).

The ABIAC is advocating for the *security* of core supports funding by moving the biennium allotment from a discretionary line item to a line item in the Department's budget. Core support services include a helpline; neuro-resource navigation; free resource directories; education and training opportunities for survivors, families and professionals; a resource fair; and access to the 19 support groups across the state. In short, core supports attend to service gaps and may serve as a life-line to newly injured people or their families.

The BIAA-ME reports that in the last few years, calls to the helpline and requests for neuro-resource facilitation support have more than tripled, with 3262 requests in 2022. Brain injury is prevalent and there is a steadily increasing demand for core support services.

Helpline Calls and Requests for NRF Support



Lastly, I would like to note that having served as a provider in Maine for over 20 years, limited workforce—both direct care workers as well as professionals and para-professionals—is a concern and does not bode well for increasing provider capacity or attending to wait lists. The brain injury wait list has doubled in the last two years and more work needs to be done. The Council supports actions that could responsibly contribute to workforce stability, and commends the work of the legislature in passing a law that provides for annual cost-of-living (COLA) increases toward this end.

In summary, the ABIAC is in favor of brain injury supports funding and COLA adjustments outlined in LD 258. And we encourage the shifting of the biennium allotment for core supports from a discretionary category to a budget line item. Thank you for your time and consideration of my testimony. Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions.

Respectfully submitted,

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