



In Support of LD 744

An Act to Ensure Access to Services for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities by Requiring Rate Studies for Home and Community-based Services

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

April 13, 2023

Good afternoon Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and esteemed Health and Human Services Committee members.

My name is Catherine Thibedeau, and I am the Executive Director of Independence Advocates of Maine. We provide services and support for people with intellectual/developmental disabilities and autism in the northern part of our State, primarily in Penobscot, Hancock, and Aroostook Counties. We have operated since 1977, serving people under Sections 21, 29, and 50. I also consult nationally on service delivery, specifically ICF/IID services. I also serve on the Essential Support Workforce Advisory Commission implemented by the 130th Legislature to examine and make recommendations for the staffing shortage crisis within the direct care workforce. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of LD 744, which would direct DHHS to conduct rate studies in 2024 for MaineCare HCBS Group Home and Community Supports and Community Membership services for people with intellectual disabilities or autism. This bill also directs the Department to maintain the staffing level flexibility after the Appendix K waiver ends in November and before new rates would be available in January 2025. I also support the testimony of Laura Cordes, MACSP Executive Director, along with my colleagues who will be speaking today.

Group Homes support 1872 people with IDD/A throughout our State; I'd estimate there are between 700-750 Homes statewide. They are 2-6 beds in size and are staffed 24/7/365, with staff providing hands-on direct support and care. Group Homes are for individuals who require significant protective oversight and supervision. Staff provides assistance with personal hygiene in the bathroom or ensuring food is prepared correctly so they don't choke, help with walking so they don't fall, help to take their medications, help regulate emotions, or help respond to a medical emergency. Group Homes are for those who NEED a person at all times to help them "get through the day." Many years ago, our State committed to the Group Homes service as the model of care to support those with high-acuity needs. This vastly differs from other states where institutions and large facilities provide such services. There are 6272 individuals who receive IDD/A services in Maine (176 in ICF/IID, 3353 in Section 21, and 2743 in Section 29) and for Residential Services:

Setting	# Served	% of all served
ICF/IID	176	3%
Intermittent Support	712	11%
Community/Other Supports Only	17%	17%
Shared Living	1792	29%
Group Home	1872	30%

We are in a devastating situation here in Maine, with more than 75 Group Homes closing in the last two years. These closures, coupled with the limited ability of folks to access (3% capacity) a higher level of care, ensuring continued adequate access to the group home service is critical.

This bill also seeks recourse for the Community Support/Community Membership service, which provides direct, hands-on support. The focus is to enable clients to participate in community-based and social relationships, build health and wellness self-care skills, and build self-sufficiency. The service is a springboard into employment for many or a way to participate in retirement activities for some. As noted above, 17% of clients receive no residential support, making this service more essential to them. The pandemic, implementation of the HCBS settings rule, and state-driven changes have created drastic changes to the structure and expectations of this service. There are stricter rules about staffing ratios and where and how services may be provided. Access to services is becoming more challenging, with at least 40 programs closing over the past two years.

Over the past two years, Group Home and Community Support Program closures have displaced hundreds, often moving people far from family and their communities where they have established and built trusted relationships and meaningful lives. These closures continue at an alarming rate, and we have reached the point that some will not have anywhere else to turn. Without legislative intervention, we can expect the closure pace to accelerate. Thus, looking forward to four years, we expect a 30% decrease in available group home beds within our State and more than 500 individuals being displaced. It is even more dire for community support, and I project it will become almost non-existent over the next few years. Higher rates are needed now to prevent these services from collapsing altogether. However, knowing that there will be rate studies scheduled in 2024, with new rates implemented by 2025, along with the amendment that creates staffing flexibility, some providers will hold on and continue services.

The individuals of Maine who rely on these essential services and supports need action. I urge your support. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,



Catherine Thibedeau
Executive Director

cthibedeau@iamsupports.org