



*“Striving to invigorate hope, bringing dreams to life.”*

**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 members of the Health and Human Services Committees.

My name is Amanda Karomba, and I serve as the CEO of Happy Haven. We have 26 homes in the Lewiston/Auburn area and have served over 60 adults with ID/DD & autism, in residential settings for the past 5 years. I myself have worked in the field for a little over 10 years.

I first want to start by thanking 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 spectrum disorder. This bill would also direct the department to establish a work group to help determine a daily rate for Group Home services and adjust the minimum staffing level to 85% after the Appendix K waiver ends in November and before new rates would be available in January 2025.

The scary and uncertain times of the pandemic took a toll on everyone but especially for those receiving group home services and the DSPs providing it. Despite the fact that workforce challenges were only intensified/worsened, we saw some show up, step up, and prevail. Unfortunately, due to the fact that we could not provide competitive pay to retain the staff, we lost many to other industries such as manufacturing companies, retail, fast food, and other States with less restrictions and better pay. This led to high overtime hours (not built in the rate), high turnover, and declining standard of care. Staff felt overworked, underpaid, and unnoticed. Many who loved providing essential care, were forced to face reality as the cost of living increased with housing, food, and childcare, to name a few. Our consumers suffered the loss of long-time staff and had to adapt to new, young, and inexperienced staff. Imagine having lived in a home for years, and then one day receiving a notice that you no longer could live in the only home you knew, solely due to the fact that there was no one available to care for you. A service you may need for the duration of your life.

We've seen individuals receiving services forced to move from a home of 30+ years in rural parts of the State to inner parts; these folks struggle tremendously having to adapt to a new community, new staff, and no familiar faces around. If a new home is not identified, these individuals risk ending up either homeless or in the ER waiting for a new home.

Happy Haven, LLC

158 Court St, Suite 13, Auburn, ME 04210

Phone 207.241.0274 · Fax 207.241.7280



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Home and Community Based Services are essential to the most vulnerable population that relies on the continuation of services to ensure they live full and meaningful lives supported by professionals that are trained to coach and inspire. This is the same population that suffered inhumane treatment in institutions and never knew anything better. Fast forward to today, services are person-centered, self-steering, and purposeful. A rate study not only would it incorporate provider & public input to share true costs & impact, but it would secure continuous services for the life-span of the recipients.

Happy Haven, like many other providers, are devoted to serve and elevate the lives of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities/ & autism, and have continued to show this commitment pre & post pandemic, regardless of the unresolved staffing crisis. But it's time to acknowledge this reality, stabilize and sustain these crucial services, through dependable long-term pay increases that uphold quality standards and keep recipients safe, supported, and prosperous.

I appreciate the Department's efforts to invest in workforce development and the cost of living adjustments and flexibilities received to date, however a viable rate, that will sustain a competitive wage, is critical and cannot wait.

In closing, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and all members of the Health and Human Services Committees, for your continued representation of your constituents, considering LD 744, and the opportunity to provide my testimony. Your commitment and joint advocacy to improving lives of those with ID/DD is commendable.

Thank you for your dedication to ensuring all Maine residents have access to high-quality and sustainable care. I'm thrilled and hopeful for the opportunity to continue this work together, to support the most vulnerable members of our community.

Graciously,

**Amanda Karomba**

**Chief Executive Officer**

**Happy Haven, LLC.**

158 Court Street, Suite 13

Auburn, ME 04210

Cell: 207-518-1758

Office: 207-241-0274

Happy Haven, LLC

158 Court St, Suite 13, Auburn, ME 04210

Phone 207.241.0274 · Fax 207.241.7280