

**Testimony of Heidi Mansir, Executive Director
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 Heidi Mansir, I am the Executive Director of Uplift, Inc. I am a family member of an individual with a developmental disability and have worked in this field for more than thirty years. I have spent much of my adult life trying to improve the system of support for individuals with intellectual and developmental (ID/DD) disabilities. I have served in leadership roles with both our state association, The Maine Association for Community Service Providers, and our federal association, the American Network of Community Options and Resources, also known as Ancor. I am currently serving on the ANCOR Board of Directors as the Immediate Past President.

Uplift is a private nonprofit Agency that provides services to 187 individuals with ID/DD in the Kennebec Valley region. We have been providing services in this community for almost 65 years.

I am writing to offer testimony in strong support of LD 744 which would direct DHHS to conduct rate studies in 2024 for MaineCare HCBS Group Home, Community Supports, and Community Membership services. This bill would also direct the department to establish a work group to help determine a daily rate for Group Home services and through the proposed amendment 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. I feel that each of these objectives are essential to prevent further a collapse of this vital system of service.

The first objective, a 2024 rate study, is critical. The current rates do not support the service and providers cannot wait multiple years for a turn in the new system of review.

Last week I had to hold a meeting with some of the individuals we support, families, guardians, and case managers. The purpose of the meeting was to share the difficult news that we are going to close another one of our programs. This is a program that we have provided for more than 30 years and now, we have determined that it is no longer possible to continue this service, it is not viable. Closing this program has a very drastic impact on 19 individuals who have been part of the Uplift family for most of their lives.

This program is the third program that we have had to close in the last two years. This one provides Community Supports, the other two programs were group homes that had provided residential supports to nine people Uplift has known and supported for decades. With these closures, people

Uplift Inc. *Dreams, Opportunity, Growth, and Laughter*

P.O. Box 1106
25 Winter Street
Gardiner, ME 04345
(207) 582-8021

are uprooted from their homes, separated from housemates, and moved to unfamiliar places with unfamiliar people.

Just yesterday, April 12, 2023, I signed the final documents to sell a 5 bedroom, Licensed, ADA compliant, fully accessible home, located in Gardiner. This was a home that we have operated as a group home for individuals with both intellectual and physical disabilities for more than nine years. We had to close this home because the program was not sustainable. This is accessible housing that will no longer be available to the people that we support.

Uplift is not closing these programs and selling these homes because the service is unwanted, or unneeded. There are individuals on waitlists to receive these services. We have had to close people's homes and our Community Support program because we just cannot hire enough staff to keep them open. The rate does not support a living wage for our employees.

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

I know that a lot of attention and resources are focused on the development of the new Lifespan Project. I am excited about the opportunities that this Waiver will bring to individuals who receive services in Maine. However, as a provider of services, and as a family member, I have never been more concerned about our "current" service system. I worry that without a rate review and the flexibility allowed in the amendment, many providers will not be able to hold on to operate in that new system. In Maine, right now, there is no other care option for individuals.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,
Heidi Mansir
Heidi.mansir@upliftmaine.org