



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 Darryl Wood, and I am the executive director for LEAP in Farmington Maine. LEAP provides residential and case management services to adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities since 1980. 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 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.

LEAP has always focused on doing all the little things to attract the best staff to our agency, because we understand quality starts and ends with the people who do the work. For the most part, we have always been able to make this work despite the low pay for our workers. This changed in January of 2020, with the onslaught of the pandemic. At that time, we had 200 workers and were able to fully staff all the people who we supported. A combination of the vaccine mandate, difficult work in a potentially covid environment and escalating costs for necessities has left us in a place where we are no longer able to recruit and retain staff in numbers sufficient to take care of these individuals, much less be a resource to families in our communities that needs our services. Currently, we have about 130 staff, and they are very tired. We have closed several homes, given notice to several individuals and consolidated other residential living situations to maximize the staffing resources we have left. We are on the verge of having to do this again. I never thought I would be in a position to tell a person we have been caring for they have to move. Or take a call from a family in need and say we have no capacity to consider helping. As a nonprofit, LEAP has a consistently low administrative percentage, and we are expected to lose money this year. We give everything we can back to our employees financially and by doing the little things, but it is not enough. You can make more stocking shelves at the big box next door than you can as a Certified DSP/CRMA at LEAP. We have lost many great DSP's who left crying out the door for more money next door.

LD744 would hopefully account for all the expenses related to running a complex organization and create a viable rate that would allow for a sustainable workforce now and into the future. If nothing is done, I fear LEAP and other organizations like us will no longer be able to provide housing and life skills support necessary to so many Mainers and their families.