

March 13, 2023

L.D. 744 Resolve, to Direct the Department of Health and Human Services to Perform Rate Studies and Rate Determinations for Providers of Certain Services for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorder

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and honored members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Bonnie-Jean Brooks. I am here today as Public Policy Consultant for OHI. We provide a variety of services in 6 Maine counties. We have been supporting people funded under the Waiver (HCBW) since 1983 when Maine started this Medicaid program. I have also been guardian for a person receiving waiver services for that time.

OHI is in favor of L.D. 744. While we are deeply appreciative of both OADS and this committee for their support of this program over the last few years, it is simply not enough!

The current rate is just not supporting the program. We have had to close homes, transfer people, and reduce the quality of what we do - sometimes to a point where we are not able to keep people safe!

People with disabilities are not able to get out into the community to live their best lives and to accomplish their dreams and aspirations and even to get to important appointments. Choice, the watchword of our commitment, is not possible.

We have over 2000 hours a week of direct support professional (DSP) openings!

We paid over \$610,000 last year in overtime but still were unable to fill many vacant hours.

We are often not able to comply with the federal "Settings" rule because we do not have enough staff to do it! We are unable to accept new people from the Waiting List, which is growing longer by the day, into group homes or our community support program - even though we have vacancies. We don't have the staff.

There has not been an approved rate study of these services for over ten (10) years while, at the same time, regulations, economic realities, waiting lists and unmet needs have increased. We can't wait any longer.

A recent national report was authored by the University of Minnesota, the Human Services Research Institute in Cambridge, and the National Association for State Directors of Developmental Disability Services. OADS is a member of the latter. It was entitled "Community Supports in Crisis: No Staff, No Services."

In its introduction, "Sounding the Alarm", the report says, "All the progress toward community living that has been made in services for people with IDD over decades is now in jeopardy - because of catastrophic labor shortages and pervasive high rates among workforce that supports them, direct support professionals (DSP's)."

The report states that "Workforce disruptions have a direct and negative effect on the well-being of people with IDD. High rates of turnover among DSP's have been linked to injuries and hospital admissions among people with IDD..."

State DD directors calling the situation we are in "a crisis", saying that we have a "catastrophic labor shortage", and that people with IDD are "in jeopardy", is nothing short of a national 911 call. We need First Responders now!

911 has been called while a popular song plays in the background, "Love can build a bridge. Don't you think it's time." We desperately need that bridge now. Please vote in favor of L.D. 744.

We deeply respect your time today.

Bonnie-Jean Brooks

Public Policy Consultant, OHI

964 Cape Jellison Road

Stockton Springs, ME 04981

bjbrooks@fairpoint.net 207-944-9093