



**Testimony of Cliff Winn, Executive Director**

**In Support of LD 744**

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committees.

My name is Cliff Winn. I am the Executive Director for Coastal Opportunities. We provide Home, Work, and Community Supports to adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and Autism in and around Knox County.

I am offering testimony in strong support of LD 744 which would address the need to systematically develop rates that would assist in assuring the survivability of the services that we provide. In the last three years, we have seen the meteoric rise of the cost of living in all areas of operation. Although there have been welcomed rate increases that have allowed us, out of necessity, to increase direct support worker wages, the total cost of operation has not been addressed adequately. A rate setting study would take a more comprehensive look at the costs of providing the array of services needed. Like everyone else in the State of Maine, agencies have been greatly impacted by the rising cost of energy, supplies, transportation, and maintenance. These factors have become a huge economic barrier to financial solvency. As pandemic related restrictions have been eased, and we strive to resume some degree of normalcy, it is apparent that this new fiscal environment is endangering future viability of the service provision sector.

Community Support services ensure that meaningful community engagement is occurring with our members and the service is vital to ensuring that individuals are closely linked to (and an integral part of) their neighborhoods, towns and cities. With the constriction of a 3 to 1 staffing pattern at all times (in addition to the implementation of the community based services rule) viability for this service model grows less likely. Community Supports are not reimbursed at a level high enough to procure adequate staffing. Without appropriate staffing...individuals stay home.

At its core, this issue is not just about the provider community trying to move forward with viable business models that are currently employing thousands of Mainers across the state... this issue is about sustaining a system that supports individuals. We have already seen these individuals have to move due to home closures... we have seen them lose the ability to meaningfully interact with their communities as programs shrink. The Pandemic did not create the current crisis—but it has greatly exacerbated the problem and accelerated a systemic decline in sustainability. When contemplating the state of our profession... I think most of the people who may be forced to move from their established residences in the future....and I think of the individuals who are still at home...waiting in hopes that community supports programs will soon be able to offer them community engagement. Meaningful and

comprehensive rate determination is necessary to halt this this chain of events. Without change now... this problem will only worsen as the industry continues to fold inward upon itself. For the people we currently serve, and for those still waiting for service... I humbly ask for your support for LD 744.

Thank you for your time and consideration

Respectfully submitted

Cliff Winn

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