

**Testimony for the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
April 13, 2023**

Regarding 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*

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee. Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Eric Meyer. I am President & CEO of Spurwink. I am here to speak in support of LD 744. At Spurwink, we provide behavioral health and educational services to children, adults, and families across Maine. Last year, we served over 8,100 Maine people affected by trauma, mental health challenges, substance use disorders, developmental disabilities and autism, so they can lead healthy, engaged lives in their communities.



Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in 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 through the proposed amendment to 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.

We greatly appreciate the Department's efforts to invest in workforce development and the cost of living adjustments received to date. These investments are critical, and much appreciated. However, a daily rate that will sustain a competitive wage is a critical next step. I have two main points to make:

First, the people we serve need consistency of relationships in order to thrive. Frequent staff turnover creates tremendous challenges for individuals we serve. The new staff are often brand new to working with people with autism and intellectual disabilities and take time to be trained and to get to know the individual needs of each person. For the individuals we serve, this frequent turnover is not a stable environment in which they can thrive.

Second, with the current rates, we are unable to fill positions. Today at Spurwink for our program serving this group of adults, we have 24 full time open positions, and cannot compete with the wages offered at other local businesses.

One of many examples: There is a young man who has lived very successfully with us for many years, who struggled this past year when staff turnover occurred. When he lost all his familiar staff, it led to a significant increase in unsafe behaviors such as self harm and elopement that we had not seen in quite some time. He needs consistency and staff who understand his needs. The constant turnover at his home has left only 1 familiar staff that truly knows him and hiring has continued to be challenging.

I urge your support for LD 744. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Eric Meyer
emeyer@spurwink.org