



Testimony of Karen D. MacDonald- 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 Karen MacDonald, and I am the Executive Director for Port Resources. Port Resources is a non-profit social services organization supporting individuals with intellectual developmental disabilities, autism, and behavioral health challenges to live fully in their communities. We support clients across Southern Maine through a variety of services; residential, outreach, shared living, community supports and outpatient mental health services. We have twenty-two licensed group homes in New Gloucester, Windham, South Portland, Portland, Gorham, Buxton, Old Orchard, and Saco. I have been working for Port for 32 years next month, starting right out of college as a Direct Support Professional and as the Executive Director since 1999.

I would like to thank you for this 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.

We have struggled immensely before and during the pandemic with significant and catastrophic front-line (direct support professionals) shortages. We have over fifty full-time positions open, which leaves over two thousand hours per week to fill by our remaining team members. We are running more than 8500 hours of overtime a month, at a cost on average of over \$75k a month- this is not sustainable for us financially, but more importantly it is not sustainable for the health and welfare of our team members. They are very tired. We cannot attract team members for what we can pay them, and to exacerbate this problem, we cannot afford to decompress our salary scale for long-term DSP's which is demoralizing for them. Operating a business in Southern Maine is further challenged by the high cost of living, lack of affordable housing, and significant competition with other service industries. This places the clients we serve in

jeopardy of being underserved with higher safety risks. The required staffing level requirement returning to the full 92.5% in November 2023 would have a devastating impact. This bill provides much-needed support by maintaining the staffing requirement at 85%. We cannot ask our already exhausted staff to do more to reach the unattainable higher staffing requirement, we will lose even more team members and put clients' safety and wellbeing at risk.

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

Due to the significant staff shortage crisis, we have been forced to close two of our homes over the last eighteen months. One in Windham serving four men, and one in Gorham serving three women. The clients in these programs were split up and moved to different homes within and outside of Port Resources. This was disruptive to their lives, to their families, and to our team members who lost their positions and had to relocate to different homes- often further away from where they lived. We were forced to make these difficult and heartbreaking decisions because we could not keep clients safe with the level of staffing we could provide in these homes and had no choice but to relocate everyone. So far, we have been able to keep our remaining homes open and operating, but fear we are living very close to the edge, and it would not take much to tip the scale and require us to make more difficult decisions. Closing a program has a far bigger impact than just closing a business, which is catastrophic enough with the impact that has on workers and customers- when we close down a group home- we are literally taking someone's home away- taking them out of their communities that they are part of- we are completely changing their lives- and that cost should not have to be paid for by those we serve. Please support LD744 and help align rates with livable wages to support us in keeping vital services open for our clients, and prevent them from losing their homes, familiar staff, and their communities.

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

Respectfully Submitted,
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