

Written Testimony of Shirley LaBranche

*LD 210 An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds, and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027*

**Joint Standing Committees on Appropriation and Financial Affairs Committee & Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs**

**February 12, 2025**

Thank you, Senator Rotondo, Senator Rafferty, Representative Gattine, Representative Murphy, and members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Education and Cultural Affairs.

My name is Shirley LaBranche, and I am a resident of South Portland. My son Luc resides full-time in Westbrook in a residential setting funded by MaineCare section 21. I am here to express my gratitude for the past funding that has supported the Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) who are critical to his care. I respectfully ask that the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) to support these workers be restored in the biennial budget and that the legislature fully fund the MaineCare rate setting system that will help sustain and support adults with intellectual disabilities.

My son Luc values and cherishes his independence made possible by these Direct Support Professionals. They help him to navigate his community in safe and beneficial ways. They are a liaison between Luc and his community allowing both Luc and the community to benefit and thrive.

The job of Direct Support Professional is not always the easiest of jobs. There has to be a great deal of flexibility. They must be ready to change plans when needed and to think on their feet. They are problem-solvers and guide their clients to make healthy choices while still respecting the clients' rights to make the decisions they make. Oftentimes it is a balancing act and I have seen these workers finesse difficult situations with grace and dignity.

The relationships Direct Support Professionals develop with their clients are invaluable. When these relationships develop over time, the job becomes easier for all involved. When adequate and competitive funding is in place, workers tend to stay in their jobs longer. There is less turnover, less time used in training and more time used for direct support: grocery shopping, planning activities, getting to work, doing laundry, cooking meals, taking walks in the neighborhood, and living a healthy, fulfilled life. These workers are a lifeline for our family.