

Written Testimony of Ide McInerney

*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 Ide McInerney, and I am a resident of Old Orchard Beach. I am a Direct Support Professional (DSP), supporting adults with intellectual disabilities under MaineCare Section 21 in their residences and communities. I am here today to ask that you restore the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) for direct care workers 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.

I am in this field as a caregiver, and I care that vulnerable adults with disabilities are treated with respect and individuality. I would love to stay in this field as I find it very rewarding spiritually, but would like to talk about things that I am noticing in this field.

Due to wages not keeping pace with the constant increase in the cost of living, we have high staff turnover. This can lead to many crisis situations with our consumers. Many of our consumers rely on consistent schedules and familiar DSPs. Different staff, weekly or even monthly, can disrupt routines, causing distress, confusion and anxiety, especially for individuals with developmental disabilities or mental health conditions. New or temporary staff may lack the deep understanding of an individual's specific needs. This can also lead to inconsistent or lower quality care impacting quality care, health, hygiene, and overall well-being. Building relationships with DSPs takes time. When staff frequently change, consumers may feel abandoned or reluctant to form new connections, leading to feelings of isolation, frustration or behavioral challenges.

DSPs are a crucial workforce sector. Fair wages and funding help prevent staffing shortages, ensuring stability and economic security for workers. We need to keep the current DSPs we have in the field and stop the high turnover rate. Inexperienced staffing can lead to higher rates of errors in medication administration, assistance with mobility, or crisis intervention. This increases the risk of accidents, injuries, or neglected needs.

Increased wages can help retain the current workforce and bring in new staffing. Higher pay would allow this important job to be more competitive with other industries and companies competing for workers. Please help us provide the most compassionate and competent care possible to adults with intellectual disabilities.