

Testimony Regarding the Governor's Biennial Budget-LD210.

February 14th, 2025

Thank you, Senator Rotundo, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Gattine, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of both the Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services. My name is Megan DuEst. I am a licensed clinical social worker from Gorham, Maine, and I am here on behalf of Spurwink Services, where I serve as the Senior Director of Adult Behavioral Health. With over 1,000 trained professionals, Spurwink provides behavioral health and education services to over 10,000 children, families, and adults across Maine.



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Spurwink recognizes the tremendous gains made to our behavioral health system over the last six years, this budget's efforts to stabilize MaineCare, and the importance of maintaining a balanced approach during the biennial budget process. With that said we are deeply concerned about several proposed cuts and the risk of capped MaineCare payments if the budget fails to pass.

Specifically, we respectfully ask the committee to:

- Address the elimination of, and fully fund, COLAs in FY26 & 27. COLAs are protected by state statute, are referenced in the Department's DOJ settlement response, and are essential for provider agencies to maintain and grow the workforce.
- Protect the social safety net for our most vulnerable Mainers by eliminating the proposed caps on General Assistance (GA). Many of these Mainers struggle with serious mental illness, and rely on general assistance to protect housing, pay for psychotropic medication, and address other emergent needs.
- Fully fund Certified Community Behavioral Health Centers (CCBHCs), leveraging a 72.9% federal match, to address the most persistent gaps in our behavioral health system.
- Protect clients and behavioral health workers by collaborating across the aisle to pass the budget, ensuring no gap in MaineCare payments.

I started and oversee the Living Room Crisis Center in Portland, Maine's first and only crisis receiving center. Spurwink strongly supports state-wide expansion of receiving centers, but it must happen in tandem with fully-funded CCBHCs. Without fully funded CCBHCs, there will not be sufficient outpatient service referral capacity for crisis receiving centers. Without enough follow-up care, individuals will remain in crisis.

Adults with serious mental illness access GA to pay room and board at private non-medical institutions (PNMI) across the state. Aside from emergency rental assistance, essential medication support, and shelter funding, any cap in GA would risk the sustainability of adult residential treatment programs across the state.

Elimination of COLAs will interfere with our ability to maintain our workforce. The Bureau of Labor Statistics Consumer Price Index for the Northeast is currently 3.7%¹. Anything less is essentially a wage cut for staff.

Any gap in MaineCare payments would jeopardize our ability to provide care.

Please protect the gains we made over the last six years, and help us close the remaining service gaps. Spurwink is available if you have any questions. Thank you for your time and consideration,

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¹ https://www.bls.gov/regions/mid-atlantic/news-release/consumerpriceindex_northeast.htm