



Senator Rotundo, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Gattine, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of both Committees.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Governor's Biennial Budget.

My name is Matt Hickey. I am the Chief Executive Officer of Creative Works, and I serve on the MACSP Board of Directors as the Chair of our Brain Injury Services Committee.

The Maine Association for Community Service Providers (MACSP) is the statewide association representing nearly one hundred agencies that deliver person-centered services and supports to individuals with disabilities. Creative Works is one of these organizations, and we provide services to more than 500 individuals with intellectual disabilities, autism, and brain injury. Creative Works serves 32 individuals with brain injury in our Section 18 residential programs.

I'm here on behalf of our MACSP members who support individuals with Brain Injury under MaineCare Sections 18 and 102 to ask you to restore funding to support annual COLAs and rate adjustments for pending MaineCare HCBS rate determinations, and to reject the MaineCare Rate Setting System amendments as proposed in Section UU of the Governor's Biennial Budget, LD 210.

We remain deeply grateful for your work over the last several years to codify and invest in the establishment of a MaineCare Rate Setting System. I know you have already heard this session how essential Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLAs) have been in stabilizing Maine's direct care workforce. After years of stagnant rates, annual COLAs have been a lifeline—helping retain thousands of direct support professionals, preventing service closures, and sustaining essential programs while providers await rate determinations.

In addition to the COLA already suspended for this year, this budget would suspend the COLA for MaineCare Section 18 Brain Injury services for an additional two years reversing hard-won investments in workforce stabilization. If COLAs are not restored, providers will go *three consecutive years without adjustments*, making it difficult to maintain programs and our workforce as we will simply be unable to keep pace with rising program costs and the state's annual minimum wage increases.

Providers in our field have waited in good faith under the MaineCare Rate Setting System for Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) - inclusive of Section 18 - to have our rates adjusted within this first five-year cycle, as promised under current law.

While a MaineCare rate determination for core HCBS services was initiated at the end of 2023, new rates have yet to be implemented. Current MaineCare rates for our services are outdated. As a result, they fail to keep pace with rising program costs and the skyrocketing expenses of employer-based benefits. Providers across the state are struggling just to meet basic health and safety requirements—when, in reality, our goal is to offer fully integrated, high-quality, person-centered services that go beyond the bare minimum.

We urge you to uphold the state's commitment to MaineCare providers, the direct care workforce, the individuals we serve, and their families by fully restoring appropriate funding for COLAs and pending rate determinations for brain injury services in the Biennial Budget.

We know you have difficult decisions ahead of you. Thank you for your service to our state and for the careful consideration that I know you will give to our workforce and the people we support who rely on MaineCare services.

Matt Hickey
Chief Executive Officer, Creative Works
MACSP Brain Injury Services Chair