



March 18, 2025

Senator Henry Ingwersen, Chair
Representative Michele Meyer, Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Cross Office Building, Room 209
Augusta, Maine 04333

Re: Testimony in Support of LD 800, An Act to Fund the Provision of Advocacy
Services to Persons with Intellectual Disabilities

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing
Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Staci Converse and I am a managing attorney at Disability Rights Maine. DRM is Maine's designated Protection and Advocacy Agency, and our mission is to advance justice and equality by enforcing rights and expanding opportunities for people with disabilities in Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 800.

The statewide advocacy work done by this team is in large part funded by the Department via Developmental Services Advocacy (DSA). I cannot overstate the importance of the work done by the advocates and attorneys under this contract, or how they have fundamentally changed the DD system for the better. These advocates and attorneys work tirelessly to investigate and address civil rights violations perpetrated against individuals with developmental disabilities. These types of cases range from seemingly small yet chronic indignities our clients face, such as not being allowed to make choices regarding food or access their communities in the way they want, to serious issues involving restraint, seclusion, abuse, and neglect. Our advocates provide compassionate, client-driven support to resolve these matters—everything ranging from providing information to attending meetings to filing grievances to representing clients in court and administrative hearings.

This DSA work has fundamentally changed the system of services in other ways. Our advocates also conduct outreach and training on the rights of people with DD. Each

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MAINE'S PROTECTION AND ADVOCACY AGENCY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

year, we conduct dozens of trainings, reaching thousands of people, including both service recipients and service providers. Because of DSA's training and outreach, people with disabilities have a better understanding that they have civil rights, and know who to contact when those rights are violated. We have also provided trainings on the guardianship system, less restrictive alternatives to guardianship, and the rights of people subject to guardianship.

The DSA advocates are dedicated and passionate in their work. However, the program has been flat-funded since its inception in 2012. In the past few years, DRM has lost two DSA advocates and has been unable to replace them. We cannot lose more advocates, and in fact need more to do the work that needs to be done. DRM is fully aware of the budget difficulties this year. We had expected an increase to our funding for the past two years. This bill would increase our current funding by \$50,000, which will not make us whole, but is crucial to DRM's ability to continue to provide the exceptional advocacy services it has been able to provide since the inception of the program in.

For the foregoing reasons, DRM supports LD 800, and respectfully requests that this Committee vote Ought to Pass.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Staci", followed by a long, horizontal, wavy line that extends to the right.

Staci Converse, Esq.
Managing Attorney
Disability Rights Maine