



*"Striving to invigorate hope, bringing dreams to life."*

**In Support of LD 1509**

*Resolve, to Maintain Access to Home and Community-based Services for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities, Autism Spectrum Disorder or Brain Injury*

**Committee on Health and Human Services**

**April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2025**

Good afternoon, esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committees.

My name is Amanda Karomba, and I serve as the CEO of Happy Haven, an agency based in Lewiston/Auburn that operates group homes for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, & autism,—many of whom have some of the most complex support needs in our State. And yet, despite these challenges, they are achieving remarkable things every day—whether it's holding a job, volunteering, forming friendships out in the community, or simply thriving in a home where they feel safe and valued.

I want to begin by thanking this committee for your efforts to elevate the direct care workforce and for your leadership in advocating for the cost-of-living adjustments (COLAs). We strongly support the restoration of those COLAs at 3.5% for FY26 and FY27.

When we talk about funding and rates, we cannot lose sight of the people behind the numbers.

Recently, one of the individuals we support made the transition from living with a family member for over 30 years into one of our homes. This was a huge life change—filled with anxiety, uncertainty, and new routines. It takes consistent staffing, patient support, and weeks of building trust for this individual to begin settling in. Over time, they grew more comfortable, began helping with meals, participated in community activities, and even started exploring opportunities to volunteer in the community.

None of this happened overnight—and none of it could have happened without a dedicated team. Staff stayed late, worked overtime, and provided reassurance every step of the way. But our ability to offer that level of support is under constant threat.

The truth is, outdated reimbursement rates continue to strain our ability to retain skilled staff. Many leave for higher-paying jobs outside the field, and the rates we operate under were never designed to support the level of overtime that's now necessary just to maintain coverage. The people we serve require consistent, trained, and compassionate staff—not constant turnover.

While we're grateful to finally see the release of the proposed rate models, the limited public comment window and lack of key details make it difficult to determine whether the rates are adequate. Under the new model, each MaineCare member will undergo a 3-hour assessment to determine their level of need, which will drive their individual budget and the rates available for services. However, without

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knowing the assessment levels for the individuals we support, the finalized service definitions in MaineCare Chapter 2, or the anticipated requirements in the forthcoming licensing rule, it is difficult to fully prepare or evaluate the adequacy of the proposed rates. This makes it nearly impossible to assess whether the proposed rates will be sufficient to provide the level of care required.

At Happy Haven, we remain committed to working within the process. But we urge this committee to support the proposed amendment and ensure that rates in the biennial budget are adequate—not just to keep programs running, but to make sure they are thriving.

Because behind every rate is a person whose success, safety, and quality of life depend on our ability to show up for them.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,

**Amanda Karomba**

**Chief Executive Officer**

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