

January 28, 2026

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

My name is Alice Pelletier, and I live in Freeport, Maine. I am testifying in support of LD 2117 on behalf of myself and my daughter Natalie.

Natalie is 32 years old. She has been diagnosed with autism, epilepsy, bipolar disorder, mental retardation, depression and anxiety. She is nonverbal, but communicates through picture communication devices, such as an iPad. She loves swimming, her friends, going out in the community - especially eating out where she can watch the cooks or going to the movies- and books.

Natalie has been in our family home her whole life. It is just me and Natalie. I work as a hairdresser in Freeport to support the two of us. Her father died a few years ago, and we have no family in the area. I have struggled to put food on the table as a single, small business owner, and still provide the twenty-four-hour care that Natalie needs.

We have tried home-based care. We were authorized 84 hours a week of care, but due to staffing they could only usually provide 40 hours, which was not enough, even if I came in after work. I looked at shared living, where they pay a family member to stay at home, but I couldn't afford to give up my business and pay our bills. Not only would I have to shut down my business, but I would have to then pay caregivers out of that small, shared living payment to go to things like my own doctor's appointments. She was rejected by day programs because she needs one-to-one care, and these programs have three-to-one staffing.

I worry about what will happen to Natalie after I am gone. She and I lived in the upper floor of the home together, with my salon on the bottom floor, until last year. After talking with other families, I found out that I could turn our family home into a group home. I converted the upstairs to a living space for Natalie and a roommate and converted the bottom into a living space for me, with a small space to still cut hair. I interviewed and selected a provider I love working with, Serenity.

We have been trying to find a roommate since it became a group home in October 2024. Due to Covid, in 2020 DHHS allowed single placements in a two-person home, and they had not changed the rule in four years. In December 2024, they went back to the old rule, that said if you did not have a roommate in 30 days to fill that bed, the provider was required to issue a discharge notice and Natalie would have to go to another group home, so that they can fill an empty bed somewhere else.

We have filed a grievance to have a hearing and appeal our case. But if we fail, and you don't change the law, Natalie will be told to leave her home. This is not just a bed – this is Natalie's home, where she has lived for decades, with a solid care plan in place and community who loves her. I ask that you pass this bill to help Natalie and families like mine, who are doing the right thing, and trying to comply with the rules. Thank you for your time and your support.