

Testimony in favor of the Governor's Supplemental Budget for the Maine Developmental Services Oversight and Advisory Board- section Z363

Dear Senator Rotundo, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Gattine, Representative Myer and Esteemed Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services and Appropriations and Financial Affairs:

My name is Cullen Ryan, and I serve as the Chair of the Maine Developmental Services Oversight and Advisory Board (OAB). I have served in this role since 2014 and have served on the OAB since its inception in 2010. I am also a parent of a 29-year-old man with intellectual/developmental disabilities. He still lives at home with me, largely because of a lack of options for independent living that might suit him, given his lack of skills and capabilities.

The OAB was established as a mechanism of compliance under 34-B for the Consent Decree to ensure adults with intellectual/developmental disabilities are served adequately, with input and guidance from a cross-section of people in the system. The OAB strategically includes people who are recipients of services, parents, service providers, and advocates who have spent their entire careers working within the system and have a fundamental understanding of the sector. This Board provides oversight, guidance, and insights to DHHS to help optimize the system. It reviews data, analyzes shortcomings, and assists with systemic improvements.

Fifteen Board members serve voluntarily on the OAB. These are very dedicated people with an enormous amount of collective experience and wisdom. The entire organization is currently held together by one staff member, the Board's Executive Director. The budget has remained unchanged for all 16 years of the Board's existence. As you know, costs have increased since 2010, and the budget doesn't reach as far as it used to. It never was adequate to meet the needs of the organization, and volunteers have been caretaking this. Our past two executive directors have stepped up to help well after their retirement, but each can only last so long in this role. The current ED is in her 80's and has wrestled with serious medical challenges while admirably fulfilling the role as best she can. We have run out of heroes. The OAB has been unable to attract the talent it needs to properly staff the organization and provide this statutorily required service to the population.

The supplemental budget before you offers a long-sought remedy. The modest increase in the OAB's operating budget would allow the organization to attract and retain staff to work to fulfill requirements under the statute. This will allow DHHS and the 6000 people served to much more fully benefit from the assembly of talented volunteers serving on the Board.

This is a miniscule part of the Supplemental Budget. But it will much better allow the intention of this statute to be met, something many dedicated people have worked for over the past decade and a half.

The insights offered by this Board are invaluable. They allow DHHS to optimize its strategies, which is the best possible way to maximize efficiency. When we get the system right, when we properly serve each person, we eliminate costly crises, inefficiencies, and better allow everyone to be included in society. Given the magnitude of Maine's investment in this sector, proper guidance and oversight is a very small and key investment that is wise.

Our system is imperfect. Of note, the last Quarterly Report reflected 11,498 Reportable Events in 3 months - a good reason for an oversight body. And, as of the last Quarterly Report from OADS, there are 2,332 people just on the Section 21 services waitlist.

The statute called for Maine to put proper safeguards in place. Faith in that commitment allowed the Consent Decree to be closed. We are currently neglecting that commitment. Please include the portion of the budget that will more properly fund the OAB for the first time in 16 years so we can follow the law and make right by that commitment. People like my son and 6000 others deserve nothing less.

OAB Purpose – Title 34-B

A. Provide independent oversight over programs and services for adults with intellectual disabilities or autism that are provided, authorized, funded or supported by the department or any other agency or department of State Government. The board shall focus on systemic concerns affecting the rights of persons with intellectual disabilities or autism, including but not limited to issues surrounding health and safety, inclusion, identification of needs and desires of persons eligible for services by the department, the timely meeting of the identified needs and effective and efficient delivery of services and supports; and [PL 2011, c. 542, Pt. A, §66 (AMD).]

B. Provide advice and systemic recommendations to the commissioner, the Governor and the Legislature regarding policies, priorities, budgets and legislation affecting the rights and interests of persons with intellectual disabilities or autism.

Relevant Portion of the Supplemental Budget:

The carrying language for MDSOAB is Part G, §1, sub-§1, p. F and appears on page 11 of the General Fund language

document: <http://www.maine.gov/budget/oliver/maine.gov/budget/files/2011/11/11%20Language.pdf.pdf>

F Any balance remaining in the Developmental Services Oversight and Advisory Board program, General Fund account in the Department of Administrative and Financial Services at the end of any fiscal year to be carried forward for the next fiscal year.

The initiative appears on page A-2 of the Part A budget

document: <https://www.maine.gov/budget/sites/main/files/publications/2025-26%20Part%20A%20Budget%20Book%20-%20Final.pdf>

Administrative and Financial Services, Department of

DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES OVERSIGHT AND ADVISORY BOARD 2363

	2025-26	2026-27
Initiative: Provides funding for the Maine Development Services Oversight and Advisory Board to meet the statutory requirements of Maine Revised Statutes, Title 34-B, section 1223.		
GENERAL FUND		
All Other	58,715	58,715
Total	58,715	58,715
Summary - GENERAL FUND		
All Other	58,715	58,715
Total	58,715	58,715