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## Testimony in Support of Annual Cost-of-Living Adjustments to MaineCare Rates

Before the Joint Committees of Appropriations and Health and Human Services

February 17, 2026

Distinguished Members of the Appropriations and Health and Human Services Committees:

My name is Bart Beattie. I'm a resident of Harpswell and serve as the Chief Operating Officer for Spurwink Services, one of Maine's premiere behavioral healthcare and human services not-for-profit organizations. With a workforce of over 1,200 dedicated professionals, Spurwink serves more than 10,000 Maine children, adults, and families each year. 75% of those services are paid for by MaineCare.

**I am here today to call for your support of Maine's behavioral healthcare system through the continuation of annual cost-of-living adjustments to MaineCare reimbursement rates.**

As you know, and as was the case last legislative session, funding for these COLAs has been excluded from the governor's proposed budget. You may also be aware that LD2177 has proposed language that would essentially codify the practice of excluding COLAs. **These changes undo a clear legislative mandate that MaineCare reimbursement rates receive an annual cost-of-living adjustment.** That mandate was enacted by the legislature to ensure that rates keep pace with the real and unavoidable costs of providing services, particularly labor-driven services that are the safety net for thousands of Mainers.

The predictable result of not applying cost-of-living adjustments is reimbursement rates that fall below the cost of providing care, forcing providers to limit services, reduce capacity, or stop accepting MaineCare altogether. At a time when affordable healthcare is under attack by the federal government, further limiting access to care to those who most need it is something that I would imagine we all agree must be avoided.

**When MaineCare rates fail to reflect actual costs, access to services is constrained.** You need not speculate about the consequences of constrained access — lack of access to required services is precisely what led to the most recent Department of Justice lawsuit and its resulting settlement. Rolling back the COLA mandate moves MaineCare policy in the wrong direction and risks repeating those same failures.

**I'd also like to remind you that while almost every industry and business has the ability to adjust prices when costs increase, MaineCare providers do not.** My wife owns a small retail business in Brunswick. As the cost of goods and wages have spiked, she has had to increase her prices to keep her business sustainable. She didn't want to as she cares deeply about her customers, but she knew she had to if she wanted to stay in business. I'm on the local school board. Even the school district has the ability to increase its revenue to match its costs. It requires an increase in property taxes — something no one wants — but it's the reality of what is needed for schools to continue to meet the community need. MaineCare providers see the exact same increases in costs. However, we can't increase our prices. We can't close the revenue gap by appealing directly to taxpayers. We rely and depend on you to ensure our prices — the MaineCare rates — keep pace with inflation. That is why only a few years ago you enacted a law to ensure rates at least keep pace with increased labor costs. That's what these very modest cost-of-living adjustments are for.

I urge you to appropriate the funding for cost-of-living adjustments to MaineCare rates in order to preserve the intent of the laws you passed, ensure continued access to quality care to those who need it most, and to account for the reality that MaineCare providers experience increased costs just like every other business and family does.

Thank you for your consideration.

Bart Beattie, LCSW  
Chief Operating Officer, Spurwink Services, Inc.

