

Written Testimony in Support of LD 415:
*Resolve Directing the Department of Health and Human Services to Increase MaineCare
Reimbursement Rates for Targeted Case Management Services To Reflect Inflation*

Good afternoon, Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. When I started working as a community case manager for Living Innovations less than a year ago, I did not expect to become passionate enough about my position to write testimony in support of LD 415, which will increase the MaineCare reimbursement rates for Targeted Case Management. My name is Nicole Korte, and while I am far from an expert in my field, it has only taken six months to learn case management meets a need no other service comes close to meeting. As you know, case managers are vital to coordinating critical services such as housing, employment, and medical care for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Take, for example, an older gentleman who I meet with, on Zoom, three times per week. He lives in a small town in southern Maine in a studio apartment above a Bagel shop. Before the pandemic, you could find him giving monthly historical lessons at his library or serving as his church's historian. Now, he is more likely to be studying the pandemic, as he has done every day for over a year. If it is the right time in the afternoon, he is sure to be riding his bike by the ocean. It may surprise you that this bright historian and cherished community member has struggled to find meaningful employment or attend a routine doctor's appointment.

That is where case management comes in. By speaking with him so often, I built a relationship grounded in something he states his life has always lacked—mutual respect. He began to trust me as a sounding board for his pandemic research. Then, he learned he could share personal details with me, like his memory of his mother taking him to the local doctor as her favorite form of punishment. I knew his distrust in the medical system could be rectified, slowly, through our relationship shaped by case management. A few months after meeting him, I asked him if he would meet with a therapist. To my surprise, he said yes. It was not long after that he thanked me for finding him a trusted confidant. I took a leap of faith and asked him to attend an appointment with a doctor via Zoom—his first appointment in years. He stated that because case management and therapy appointments went well, he was willing to venture into

the world of medical care. He has an annual physical scheduled for next month. Without case management, he never would have been connected to a therapist or doctor. While you and I might be able to understand hesitation about talking to a therapist or attending a yearly check-up, we do not know what it means to be outside of the very systems build to help us. With the help of case management, he is learning to trust the people and systems put in place to meet his needs.

While this is a success story, it is also a story about case management. The work does not stop here. . This year, I will help him, a man with years of historical experience, find meaningful employment through meetings with job development, vocational rehabilitation, and benefits counseling. He has entrusted me with obtaining a copy of his social security card as a document he will need for employment. I have become fast friends with the folks at his local social security office, completing phone interviews, sending in paperwork, and connecting them to him. When the time comes for him to become a valued employee, he will have the necessary documents ready to start his job.

This year, I will help him to complete a home inspection to be sure that his housing subsidy continues. I will recertify his MaineCare coverage and Food stamp benefits. I will coordinate with his staff for weekly trips to the grocery store. I will continue to help him budget and save money while paying for things he loves, like books and the TV channel that gets Gunsmoke. This all falls under my role as case manager, and I love it.

He is just one of twenty-three people I currently support. Everyone has their own story, their own barriers, and their own goals. As a case manager, it is my job to assess needs, goals, and community connections, then connect people to resources. It is my job to provide quality services, maintain paperwork requirements, complete trainings, attend regular supervision meetings, complete unfunded mandates, and travel. It is also my job to maintain a minimum billing of 25 hours per week, to meet budgetary requirements.

As a case manager, I am requesting your support of LD415, which will increase the MaineCare reimbursement rates for Target Case Management and reflect rises in costs due to inflation over the years. This rate has not been adjusted since 2009. The average national cost of a loaf of bread was \$2.05 in 2009 and is now \$2.50 in 2021. The average house in Maine cost

\$164,000 in 2009 and is worth \$270,000 today. It is evident that living expenses are higher than ten years ago, but targeted case management has not seen an increase in reimbursement. During this time, the state's requirements of case managers, including OADS mandates which

may not be billable or reimbursed, have increased. Just since I started my position less than a year ago, many steps have been added to ensure that individuals receive services in the most integrated setting possible. This is a good, necessary part of my job, but it is an example of how tasks get added to case managers' loads without financial compensation. There are consequences to this.

Since I have been with Living Innovations, three Case Manager have moved on to different positions. When you consider that we are a team of 10, the turnover rate is unarguably high. Due to these changes, my company has had to refer out numerous individuals we can no longer support. Many agencies are reporting that they do not have the capacity to accept the referrals. There are not enough case managers to meet the current need in our state. It is the people like the man I mentioned today who suffer when relationships are severed. An increase in reimbursement rates would alleviate one part of the problem.

Living Innovations, as a case management team, is requesting your support of LD 415. Living Innovations has been providing services to people with intellectual and developmental disabilities for 25 years. We are a provider of Section 13 Adult Case Management, serving 224 individuals as a team of 10 case managers. Each of us value our career, and in return, the individuals we work with value our services. Please consider supporting LD 415 to reflect the *value* Case Managers bring to the state of Maine.

Please contact me with any questions you may have.

Nicole Korte
Community Case Manager
Living Innovations
(207)-590-4826