

April 20, 2021

Good Afternoon,

Senator Claxton and Representative Meyer, and HHS Committee members, thank you so very much for meeting with me today. I would also like to thank Senator Keim, Senator Stewart, and Representative Craven for sponsoring the three bills I am testifying in favor of today.

My name is Ellis Baum and I am the Regional Director of Residential Resources, located in Westbrook. We provide support to over 50 adults with I/DD throughout Southern Maine in group homes and shared living homes that are funded through Sections 21 and 29. We employ approximately 100 Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) and contract with over 20 Shared Living providers. I am also testifying today on behalf of the Maine Association of Community Service Providers (MACSP) as the Vice President of its Board of Directors, as Co-Chair of MACSP's Legislative Committee, and Chair of MACSP's Workforce Shortage Committee.

I am testifying today in favor of three proposed bills:

LD 878, Resolve, To Increase MaineCare Reimbursement Rates for Services Provided by Direct Care Workers

LD 1267, Resolve, To Provide Medicaid Rate Increases for Professionals Working with Individuals with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities

LD 1469, Resolve, To Give Direct Service Providers Hazard Pay and To Pay Additional COVID-19 Pandemic Costs

The theme of my testimony today is going to be one of fatigue. I have worked for my organization as well as this industry providing support to adults with I/DD for over 21 years. I began my work as a DSP and have held nearly every position to hold along the way to becoming Director of the agency. I know firsthand what it feels like to string together 70-hour weeks providing care to people with significant needs and challenging behavior. I know what its like to be tired. So, when I see some of my employees work longer hours...80...90...and 100-hour weeks, my heart breaks for them. The sad fact is that they are working these insane hours because they cannot pay their bills working 40 hours and I have hundreds of open hours per week.

Throughout 14 locations, I currently 714 open hours that must be covered each week. While I am grateful this number hasn't climbed any higher, I have reached a period where I can no longer remember a time when the number was lower than 700 hours. It is nearly impossible to hire people for the open positions I have. Even more grim is the fact that consistently hovering around 700 open hours does NOT mean that I am retaining employees either, it simply means that fewer and fewer people are doing the work. This is how I have arrived at employees working 80, 90, and 100-hour work weeks and is the epitome of fatigue.

There is so much to unpack as to why this dynamic is occurring and I am grateful that the bills I am testifying in favor of help me do so. As I noted, my career in I/DD services began in year 2000 where I was paid \$8 per hour as a DSP. At current, the reimbursement rate for I/DD services under section 21 affords a DSP wage of 11.21 per hour. After 21 years, a \$3.21 raise does not pass what I would call the "sniff" test, but it does not even meet the Minimum Wage requirement in the State of Maine either. While there is some relief seemingly coming through the Back to Basics budget recently passed, the increase seems

intended to address the inadequacy of the reimbursement rate compared to the Minimum Wage standard only, versus obtaining a productive livable wage.

LD 878 would require DHHS to increase reimbursement rates by no less than \$2 per hour. I am hopeful that this increase would not only honor the people that have continued to work through the hardest of times, but to also attract new workers to this industry and stem the bleeding of hours my agency and dozens of other are experiencing.

Fatigue can spring from many places. I have well documented the type of fatigue that comes from working endless hours, but it can also come from having the same conversation, making the same request, from pleading your case, repeatedly without notable results. I have been advocating for people I/DD and the extraordinary people that support this population for over 20 years. I am weary of trying to convince lawmakers and department administration that the I/DD population deserves a high-quality workforce, and that workforce deserves adequate pay. Over my 20 year span, the very few increases that have been given, have simply been enough to keep our collective heads above water. Issues such as inflation, cost of living rising every year, and lack of affordable housing to name of few just have not been addressed for the average DSP in Maine. There are over 10,000 DSPs working in this state, which means investing in them, means investing in Maine. LD 1267 would require DHHS to amend its rules governing MaineCare reimbursement rates to reflect cost increases from 2010 to 2020. I am strongly in favor of this bill.

I am reminded of my last example of fatigue by the very nature of how I am speaking in front of you today. Testifying through the wonder of technology versus in person, is a reminder that we are still navigating the tremendous impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic. While I have already shared some of the staffing issues that are present, there are more chapters to this story to tell. Staff are leaving this industry due to the low paying nature of this work that I have outlined but are also seeking lower risk positions. This same dynamic is why people are not entering this workforce. MACSP has collected the following data:

- a 16-20% loss of workforce and are unable to fill positions and are struggling to maintain adequate levels of care.
- an increase in the resignation of skilled and valued veteran staff due to the current challenges, as well as fewer new applicants, and high overtime rates for the remaining staff just to keep the most basic supports in place.
- As of January 2021, MACSP providers report a combined total of more than 17,000 open service hours per week that they are unable to provide to Mainers with IDD due to the current staffing crisis. *MACSP Workforce Survey conducted in January of 2021. Results from twenty-five agencies.*

Throughout this pandemic, I have witnessed countless heroic acts from my staff and my organization has implemented "Hero" pay on three occasions. While it was nice to reward inspiring work, it has not been sufficient to stabilize our workforce. Given the stats above, this is indicative of the I/DD provider community at large. LD 1469 would direct DHHS to provide a temporary four month (Jan-April) 25% rate increase for Section 21 and 29 services to allow for hazard (Hero) and incentive pay to stabilize the DSP workforce. Working over a year in pandemic conditions, caring for sick people, managing risk to yourself as well as your family, working dozens of hours per week because there simply is not anyone else to do the work is the ultimate definition of fatigue. Please support this bill.

Thank you for your time, commitment, and dedication through this difficult legislative session. I am grateful for your effort, and hopefully for your support on the bills I discussed today.

Ellis Baum
Residential Resources

April 20, 2021

Good Afternoon,

Senator Claxton and Representative Meyer, and HHS Committee members, thank you so very much for meeting with me today. I would also like to thank Senator Keim, Senator Stewart, and Representative Craven for sponsoring the three bills I am testifying in favor of today.

My name is Ellis Baum and I am the Regional Director of Residential Resources, located in Westbrook. We provide support to over 50 adults with I/DD throughout Southern Maine in group homes and shared living homes that are funded through Sections 21 and 29. We employ approximately 100 Direct Support Professionals (DSPs) and contract with over 20 Shared Living providers. I am also testifying today on behalf of the Maine Association of Community Service Providers (MACSP) as the Vice President of its Board of Directors, as Co-Chair of MACSP's Legislative Committee, and Chair of MACSP's Workforce Shortage Committee.

I am testifying today in favor of three proposed bills:

LD 878, Resolve, To Increase MaineCare Reimbursement Rates for Services Provided by Direct Care Workers

LD 1267, Resolve, To Provide Medicaid Rate Increases for Professionals Working with Individuals with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities

LD 1469, Resolve, To Give Direct Service Providers Hazard Pay and To Pay Additional COVID-19 Pandemic Costs

The theme of my testimony today is going to be one of fatigue. I have worked for my organization as well as this industry providing support to adults with I/DD for over 21 years. I began my work as a DSP and have held nearly every position to hold along the way to becoming Director of the agency. I know firsthand what it feels like to string together 70-hour weeks providing care to people with significant needs and challenging behavior. I know what its like to be tired. So, when I see some of my employees work longer hours...80...90...and 100-hour weeks, my heart breaks for them. The sad fact is that they are working these insane hours because they cannot pay their bills working 40 hours and I have hundreds of open hours per week.

Throughout 14 locations, I currently 714 open hours that must be covered each week. While I am grateful this number hasn't climbed any higher, I have reached a period where I can no longer remember a time when the number was lower than 700 hours. It is nearly impossible to hire people for the open positions I have. Even more grim is the fact that consistently hovering around 700 open hours does NOT mean that I am retaining employees either, it simply means that fewer and fewer people are doing the work. This is how I have arrived at employees working 80, 90, and 100-hour work weeks and is the epitome of fatigue.

There is so much to unpack as to why this dynamic is occurring and I am grateful that the bills I am testifying in favor of help me do so. As I noted, my career in I/DD services began in year 2000 where I was paid \$8 per hour as a DSP. At current, the reimbursement rate for I/DD services under section 21 affords a DSP wage of 11.21 per hour. After 21 years, a \$3.21 raise does not pass what I would call the "sniff" test, but it does not even meet the Minimum Wage requirement in the State of Maine either. While there is some relief seemingly coming through the Back to Basics budget recently passed, the increase seems intended to address the inadequacy of the reimbursement rate compared to the Minimum Wage standard only, versus obtaining a productive livable wage.

LD 878 would require DHHS to increase reimbursement rates by no less than \$2 per hour. I am hopeful that this increase would not only honor the people that have continued to work through the hardest of times, but to also attract new workers to this

industry and stem the bleeding of hours my agency and dozens of other are experiencing.

Fatigue can spring from many places. I have well documented the type of fatigue that comes from working endless hours, but it can also come from having the same conversation, making the same request, from pleading your case, repeatedly without notable results. I have been advocating for people I/DD and the extraordinary people that support this population for over 20 years. I am weary of trying to convince lawmakers and department administration that the I/DD population deserves a high-quality workforce, and that workforce deserves adequate pay. Over my 20 year span, the very few increases that have been given, have simply been enough to keep our collective heads above water. Issues such as inflation, cost of living rising every year, and lack of affordable housing to name of few just have not been addressed for the average DSP in Maine. There are over 10,000 DSPs working in this state, which means investing in them, means investing in Maine. LD 1267 would require DHHS to amend its rules governing MaineCare reimbursement rates to reflect cost increases from 2010 to 2020. I am strongly in favor of this bill.

I am reminded of my last example of fatigue by the very nature of how I am speaking in front of you today. Testifying through the wonder of technology versus in person, is a reminder that we are still navigating the tremendous impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic. While I have already shared some of the staffing issues that are present, there are more chapters to this story to tell. Staff are leaving this industry due to the low paying nature of this work that I have outlined but are also seeking lower risk positions. This same dynamic is why people are not entering this workforce. MACSP has collected the following data:

- a 16-20% loss of workforce and are unable to fill positions and are struggling to maintain adequate levels of care.
- an increase in the resignation of skilled and valued veteran staff due to the current challenges, as well as fewer new applicants, and high overtime rates for the remaining staff just to keep the most basic supports in place.
- As of January 2021, MACSP providers report a combined total of more than 17,000 open service hours per week that they are unable to provide to Mainers with IDD due to the current staffing crisis. MACSP Workforce Survey conducted in January of 2021. Results from twenty-five agencies.

Throughout this pandemic, I have witnessed countless heroic acts from my staff and my organization has implemented "Hero" pay on three occasions. While it was nice to reward inspiring work, it has not been sufficient to stabilize our workforce. Given the stats above, this is indicative of the I/DD provider community at large. LD 1469 would direct DHHS to provide a temporary four month (Jan-April) 25% rate increase for Section 21 and 29 services to allow for hazard (Hero) and incentive pay to stabilize the DSP workforce. Working over a year in pandemic conditions, caring for sick people, managing risk to yourself as well as your family, working dozens of hours per week because there simply is not anyone else to do the work is the ultimate definition of fatigue. Please support this bill.

Thank you for your time, commitment, and dedication through this difficult legislative session. I am grateful for your effort, and hopefully for your support on the bills I discussed today.