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April 20, 2021

Re: LD 1157, An Act To Ensure MaineCare Reimbursement Rates for Home and Community-based Services for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities or Autism Are Adjusted in Accordance with Increases in State and Municipal Minimum Wage; and LD 1267, Resolve, To Provide Medicaid Rate Increases for Professionals Working with Individuals with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Cullen Ryan, and I am the Executive Director of C Community Housing of Maine or CHOM, the largest supportive housing provider for homeless populations in Maine. Our staff of 11 works collaboratively with more than 50 different service provider organizations to effectively and efficiently house some 1100 of Maine's most vulnerable people, including more than 100 people with intellectual/developmental disabilities (ID/DD). I am also a parent of a 24-year-old son with ID/DD. In addition to being a parent, I serve as Chair of the Maine Coalition for Housing and Quality Services, a coalition of some 4000 people, consisting primarily of parents, that focuses on housing and quality services for people with ID/DD. Ultimately, the goal of the Coalition is to create a system of quality housing and personal supports that is person and family centered, with choice, dignity, and efficiency being at the forefront of efforts. I also serve as chair the Maine Developmental Services Oversight and Advisory Board (MDSOAB) Board.

I am testifying today in support of LD 1157, which would increase the reimbursement rates to providers of home and community-based services to ID/DD by the same amount of increase required under the minimum wage law. The bill also states that if a municipal ordinance increases other wage requirements in the ordinance, such as a requirement for time-and-a-half in certain circumstances, that amount of increase is also required in the reimbursement rates. And, LD 1267, which would provide rate increases for Section 29 commensurate with cost increases from 2010 to 2020. I urge the Committee to support any bill which would increase the rates for HCBS, specifically rates for direct support professionals (DSPs).

The reduced rates over the past decade have made it progressively harder for providers to hire and retain direct care staff, or DSPs, the people who work with my son and others with intellectual/developmental disabilities. DSPs are the very nexus of the system of care. Direct service professionals need to be paid enough to want to work in the field to begin with, and to stay in the field once they've begun their careers. If agencies can't hire anyone, if agencies can't retain anyone, people like my son won't receive services.

And, providers need to be able to keep their doors open while paying a wage high enough to accomplish this. The current rates, though improved in recent years, are not yet sustainable for providers to succeed in hiring and retaining staff, which has worsened amid the pandemic. This ultimately hurts the recipients of needed services. Despite the great need, agencies can only lose money for so long before it becomes completely untenable to provide services. The situation has become dire for providers across the state, especially amid the pandemic.

The bills before this Committee today to increase DSP rates will drastically help agencies attain and retain dedicated direct support professional staff, ensuring that people in Maine with ID/DD have access to quality, continuous, essential support services.

I believe helping everyone reach their full potential is the way to go. I hope that you will invest in helping people with intellectual/development disabilities have access to and receive the services they need by supporting the aforementioned biennial budget initiatives.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.