

Maggie Hoffman  
Hampden

To the Chairpersons and honorable members of the Health & Human Services committee. My name is Maggie Hoffman, and I am testifying in FAVOR of LD 962, An Act to Appropriate Funds to Eliminate Waiting Lists for Home and Community-based Services for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities, Autism, Brain Injury and Other Related Conditions.

My son Jake's basic life and social skills and his mental health were devastated by the Section 29 and 21 waitlists.

We moved to Maine 2 ½ years ago. It took many months of jumping through hoops to be deemed eligible for HCBS services for adults with developmental disabilities. But that was just the first step. Jake arrived in Maine a man who had been employed for almost 8 years in a micro job (6 hours a week). He had positive relationships with the staff who supported him and with his co-workers. Despite his intellectual, behavioral, physical and mental health challenges, Jake's life had purpose and he was part of his community.

After a year on the waitlist, he was adrift. Jake stopped interacting with his dogs, dragged on our walks, and neglected his most basic grooming; his depression caused him to stop speaking. Jake had no reason to get up in the morning.

After the many months of eligibility delays, and then the additional year of waiting (what a euphemism for isolation), Jake received Section 29 funding. Trust me, the offer of the waiver was appreciated, but it didn't immediately confer services. We had to search for providers who were willing and able to hire, train and supervise staff, and that process took 3 more months. Like everyone in Maine, the pandemic shut down staffing options, and compounded my son's loneliness.

When we and new staff cautiously connected a few months ago, Jake was a different man. He didn't make eye contact; he whispered the few words he uttered. Listless and resistant to encouragement, he confounded the staff who came to work with him as they didn't know how to reach through the wall he had built around himself.

HCBS funding is best spent from the moment someone transitions from school to adult services. Our state and communities fund our schools to prepare all of their students to be productive and full-fledged members of our neighborhoods. We are poor stewards of the tax dollars spent on education when we put people with disabilities on the shelf and tell them that Maine doesn't value their skills or their humanity.

If you eliminate waitlists, young adults will be fueled by their skills, their excitement, and their social capital to live side by side with all of us.

If you eliminate waitlists, young adults will be well-supported, able to volunteer or go on to further studies or take a job.

If you eliminate waitlists, the adults who wish to live outside of their families' homes will have the funding to live their lives more independently.

If you eliminate waitlists, parents can be productive workers themselves, instead of dropping out of the labor force to care for their adult children. Their loss of income, savings for retirement and social isolation have tremendous costs as well.

Every Mainer has been deeply affected by the pandemic. Many Mothers have left their jobs to stay home because day care and schools were closed for many months. Loss in income has led to deep despair and a life lived on the precipice, with fear of loss of housing and food insecurity. Children are lonely, depressed, and their skills have regressed. Parents are unmoored and their identities have taken a huge hit.

That is what every year looks like for parents of Mainers who are on waitlists for home and community-based services.

I urge you to eliminate the waitlists. Value all people, including those with disabilities.