



May 10, 2021

Senator Ned Claxton, Chair
Representative Michele Meyer, Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Cross Office Building, Room 209
Augusta, Maine 04333

Re: Testimony in support of LD 1649, An Act To Make the Shared Living Program Accessible for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities or Autism

Dear Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Staci Converse and I am an attorney at Disability Rights Maine. Thank you for the opportunity for Disability Rights Maine (DRM) to provide testimony in support of LD 1649. This legislation would make the shared living option under Maine's Section 21 and 29 home and community-based waiver programs available to more Mainers with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Shared living is a roommate-like model of support where individuals with disabilities live with a provider and their family. Typically, the person with a disability will move into the single person home owned by shared living provider. The shared living provider supports the individual with living skills, personal care, and community engagement, among other things. For these supports, the shared living provider is paid a stipend.

Currently, the rate the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) pays to a shared living provider does not vary based on the needs of the individual with disabilities served. This has had the effect that individuals with high needs are frequently unable to find a shared living provider willing to work with them. This legislation would require DHHS to convene a working group to review the shared living program to determine whether to modify the program to provide different stipend rates.

If this change were implemented, it could have the affect of making the program more accessible to individuals with higher needs.

Additionally, individuals who receive the sections 21 and 29 waivers are eligible to receive up to \$10,000 for home accessibility adaptations through the waiver program. In a state like Maine, with very little physically accessible housing, these home accessibility funds are essential to individuals who need physical modifications to their residences. Per state and federal law, these funds are limited to properties owned by the individual with a disability or their family and are not available to unrelated shared living providers. The result of this is that many individuals with physical disabilities are unable to move in with a shared living provider because the home is not accessible to them. This legislation would add home accessibility adaptations for shared living residences to an already existing contingency fund.

For the foregoing reasons, DRM supports this legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

/s/ Staci Converse
Staci Converse
Managing Attorney