

# **MAINE State Report**

## **By Darla Stimpson Chafin**

The State Legislature adjourned on May 2nd without addressing funding for many issues including reimbursement rates for direct care workers. This is paid to nonprofit agencies that operate group homes. A bill was introduced last year to increase the reimbursement rate to \$10 per hour. However, instead of passing the bill, it was held over until this session while temporarily increasing the rate to that amount due to the difficulty in staffing group homes. Without further action by the Legislature, that rate will revert to the 2017 level on July 1. That is \$9.17 per hour. Since in January, the minimum wage in the state was increased to \$10 per hour, the non-profit agencies will have to find the balance needed through some other source. Some group homes have already closed due to lack of direct service staff.

Parents and family members have and continue to send letters to Legislative leadership, their Legislative Representative and Senator. A petition is circulating in support of passing this funding bill. Organizations such as MACSP (a provider organization) and the Maine Coalition for Housing and Quality Services (a group of approximately 4,000 families, clients, and professionals in the field) have sent letters of concern to leadership. The newspapers have been most supportive. A majority of legislators have voted for this, but it is now caught in a tangle of grouping of bills or voting on them individually (individual votes evidently can be vetoed by the governor who seems to be setting a record for vetoes, but grouping forces legislators to include other actions that their supporters have asked them to vote against).

It has just been announced that the Legislative budget committee is meeting on Wednesday to review this bill as well as many, many others left on the Special Appropriations Table when the session ended. Hopefully, this is an indication that there will be a special session of the legislature being held in the near future.

There has been an expansion of services allowed under the Medicare Section 29 waiver, and a doubling of the cap, but there is a problem in finding those services. Therefore an individual's approval may expire while a client's family or he is still searching for the approved resource. However, the importance of that expansion should not be minimized. It is a major change and the search for appropriate services is a "growing pain" that we hope will disappear as professionals realize that there is now a funding source to offer more services. This positive step was accomplished with

cooperation and participation between the department and the Coalition mentioned above.

We use a Section 21 waiver for group homes, etc. That currently has a waiting list of approximately 1700. None of these are in Priority 1 (Priority one is an immediate need for care without any other backup resources available). However, that does not mean that elderly parents and other serious problems are not included in the other priorities and need to be addressed.

Children's Services are going through many of the same problems that the Adult Services are. Unhappily, I am not as up to date on those since that is a separate division of Human Services. And really, it is difficult to be up to date since staffing everywhere is unstable. That includes in State government.

Although I heard the Commissioner state that he wants to have questions come directly to the department where they can be discussed and answered, I personally have found it much more difficult to speak with members of his staff than in the past. Telephone lines have snafus in transfers and for the first time, I can't seem to keep track of who is doing what. Case managers are being contracted out and so that lost an important direct contact. The aim seems is for all services to be contracted out, but I find the contractees sometimes as befuddled as I am.

Sorry I don't have more to offer. I can say that I am most grateful that my daughter seems happy with the people who staff her current group home, and her roommates were with her when they were in the now closed institution. She is aging and developing more problems, but she is also smiling. For that I am most grateful. And I am grateful for all of you who keep my spirits up and help me to know that the work is going on everywhere. Thank you.