

For Immediate Release

Three Maine Nonprofits Sign Letter of Intent to Merge, Ensuring a Stronger Future for Disability Services

Augusta, Maine February 3, 2025 — Three prominent nonprofit organizations serving individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and behavioral health needs in Maine—GMS, Uplift, and Independence Advocates of Maine—are excited to announce the signing of a formal letter of intent to join together into a single, unified organization. This milestone marks the next phase of *Project Lighthouse*, an initiative designed to secure the long-term sustainability of critical services while enhancing quality, innovation, and scope of services.

Why This Merger Matters

In a rapidly changing service delivery landscape, the partnership between these organizations reflects their shared commitment to adapt and put the needs of those they serve first. The merger will allow the new organization to:

- **Streamline operations:** Minimize administrative redundancies and lower overhead costs.
- **Increase financial stability:** Combine financial resources and diversify funding streams.
- **Expand services and reach:** Pool expertise and infrastructure to innovate and serve more individuals across Maine.
- **Strengthen advocacy:** Increase our impact at the state and federal levels to advocate for policies that benefit individuals with disabilities.

The boards of directors for all three organizations unanimously agreed to pursue this strategic alignment, recognizing the benefits of collaboration to navigate challenges such as workforce shortages, rising operational costs, shrinking reimbursements, and increasing competition from larger national providers.

A Shared Vision

The new organization will adopt a unified name, mission, and vision, focusing on shared governance and leadership. Staff from all three agencies will be engaged throughout the transition process to ensure that the cultures of the organizations align and that the voices of employees and individuals served are integral to shaping the future.

Leadership Perspectives

“We are excited to take this important step together,” said Heidi Mansir, Executive Director, Uplift. “This merger ensures that the services we provide to individuals with disabilities will not only remain strong but grow to meet new challenges and opportunities.”

“Our shared vision allows us to build on the strengths of each organization while creating new opportunities to serve our community better,” said Catherine Thibedeau, Executive Director,

Independence Advocates of Maine. “This partnership reflects our dedication to innovation and sustainability.”

“This merger is about more than just combining organizations; it’s about combining values and missions to make a lasting difference,” said Ann-Marie Mayberry, Executive Director, GMS Together, we can achieve what none of us could do alone.”

What’s Next

The organizations have begun creating a unified corporate structure, with the legal and operational merger targeted for completion by July 1, 2025. The integration of services and operations will occur over the following 1-2 years.

About the Organizations

GMS: GMS is a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting adults with intellectual disabilities and autism across 14 counties in Maine. We provide a wide range of services, including shared living, home support, community support, case management, and residential services. Founded in 1980 by a group of passionate advocates, GMS has spent over four decades developing programs that emphasize knowledge, respect, and dignity. We are committed to improving the lives of those we serve by collaborating with people served, guardians, family members, caseworkers, agencies, and advocates. The individuals receiving services are empowered to live, work, volunteer, and socialize in their communities, supported by a compassionate team of professionals dedicated to their well-being.

Uplift: Uplift, Inc. is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing group home, employment, community support, shared living, case management, and behavioral health services to approximately 150 adults. While our services extend from Portland to Bangor, our primary focus is the Kennebec Valley region, including Gardiner, Augusta, Winthrop, Waterville, and Randolph. We employ 100 residents of Maine and have been serving this community for 66 years

IAM: Independence Advocates of Maine (IAM) started in 1977 as a single program, Treats Falls House, an ICF/IID supporting people with exceptional medical needs, still operating today in Orono. Over time, their services expanded with programs and locations primarily within Penobscot and Aroostook counties, including varying residential support (group homes, independent living, shared living), community support, employment support, and enabling technology. Today, IAM is still dedicated to its mission, ensuring that people with disabilities in Maine have the tools and support they need to thrive.

Project Lighthouse has been guided by Consulting for Human Services (CFHS), which has provided advisory services to all three organizations throughout this process.

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