



Senator Rotundo, Senator Pinny Beebe-Center, Representative Sachs and Representative Salisbury and the good members of the Appropriations and Criminal Justice Committees,

My name is Betsy Sweet, and I represent the Behavioral Health Community Collaborative – eight non-profit community based mental health agencies for children and adults. (Sweetser, Opportunity Alliance, Spurwink, Shalom House, KidsPeace, Volunteers of America, Gateway Community Services, Oxford County Mental Health Services).

I am here neither for nor against the Corrections budget as I do not have expertise in that area. However, I do know that this budget requests approximately \$45 million additional dollars for corrections – including an additional \$2 million for Long Creek. At the same time, police and law enforcement officers tell us that 60-70% of their calls are substance abuse and mental health related, and that currently the options for dealing with these issues are almost exclusively limited to the emergency room and/or jail.

Although the vast majority of law enforcement efforts now deal with mental health and SUD – the vast majority of our money is going to police and corrections. The “incidental” increases of almost 2 million dollars at Long Creek is approximately the same as the *entire budget* for the emergency crisis call lines (988).

We have approximately 3000 law enforcement officers in this state. We have, as of today, 76 mobile crisis workers – the people who we want to be available, statewide, to address the mental health and substance use disorder crises that police are called to when there is no one else.

This does not make any sense –not in terms of economics, not in terms of the training individuals get for their jobs and certainly not in terms of what is best practice for the individual who needs help.

Historically the increase in the corrections budget has passed easily – without too much discussion. I am hoping that this year, that changes.

It must change. And we know it. All the research tells us this. What we are doing does not work. Yet we keep doing it.

It will take courage to change these priorities. If the roof of our neighbor's house was falling in and they were spending all their money repaving the driveway – we would NOT think this was a good idea. And if they did it year after year as the roof got worse and worse, we would think it was terrible. Yet that is what we are doing year after year and our problems are getting worse.

To turn this ship around will take courage. A lot of courage. But the way to have courage is to, have courage, and to do this very big shift that needs to be done. We all know it is time. We now must do it. And when we do, we will be addressing difficult needs with the right tools at the right time. And you will be planting seeds of hope.

Thank you.