

***In- Support
LD 1084***

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and honorable members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services,

I'm Jayne Van Bramer, Sweetser's President and CEO and we are part of a coalition of partners including the Behavioral Health Community Collaborative and the Maine Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services. Sweetser is in support of Rep. Crafts bill, LD 1084 a Resolve, to Alleviate the Behavioral Health Workforce Shortage by Allowing the Training and Granting of Behavioral Health Certifications by Community-based Agencies and Hospitals.

It is widely recognized and agreed upon that we are currently facing a crisis in youth mental health. Additionally, it is clear that at least 10,000 of your constituents—both children and adults—are waiting for behavioral health services in Maine. The primary barrier preventing access to mental health and substance use treatment in Maine is workforce shortages. This is the leading cause of the thousands of Mainers and Maine children who are waiting for the support and care they need. Every Mainer deserves access to high-quality treatment and services. Tackling this workforce crisis must be a top priority for our coalition, and it should be a priority for this legislature as well.

Having worked in several other states throughout my career, I have never seen a more prescriptive and onerous approach to training our staff for this field. There is a simplicity in other states that reduces barriers and empowers providers like us to ensure greater involvement in our own staff's professional preparation and development. The current alphabet soup of certification distinctions seems to be counterproductive and just requiring providers to submit evidence of course completion to an outside entity, only to receive a certificate that we could easily print ourselves is redundant.

This bill aims to accomplish several things. First, to simplify the process of hiring staff from other states and re-hiring individuals who have previously worked in behavioral health organizations. Second, to place the accountability for staff training with the responsible party. When you think about it, Sweetser, along with other licensed behavioral health organizations, is responsible for ensuring the competency of our staff. We are accountable for their actions and the quality of the services they deliver. Therefore, we must also oversee and direct their training. During licensing and contract reviews, HR files are thoroughly examined to guarantee that staff are properly trained and equipped to provide the services we offer.

Currently, Maine's centralized training system requires providers to duplicate much of the training according to their own policies, a process we call "Sweetserizing"—adapting what staff have learned to fit our specific facilities, resources, policies, and business rules.

Our resources are limited, and we must prioritize spending on areas that truly add value and directly address the workforce crisis. If we do nothing this year, the waitlists for behavioral health services will only grow longer. Without taking decisive steps toward meaningful change and action, we risk worsening this crisis.

For next steps, we would be supportive of Rep. Crafts efforts to get stakeholders together, including representatives from DHHS, to find a path forward for this committee's consideration.

Thank you for your time,

Sincerely,
Jayne Van Bramer
President & CEO