



# BECKET MAINE

Testimony of Justin Gifford, Becket Maine Inc.  
Speaking in support of LD 1745

Submitted to the Committee on Health and Human Services on 04/28/2025

Distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:

I submit this testimony in support of LD 1745: An Act to Stabilize Residential Treatment Capacity for Children and Youth in Maine, on behalf of Becket Maine.

I began my career with Becket a little over 25 years ago in a residential treatment program as an overnight direct support professional. I found the work rewarding and meaningful, which sparked my desire to make a career out of it. Over the years, I have had the opportunity to garner a great deal of experience in children's residential treatment starting from providing direct care to my current position as the Executive Director.

When I began my career (2000), there were approximately 900+- licensed beds here in the State of Maine, which is a stark contrast to the 181 licensed beds currently in our state. In the last five years, I myself have had to shut down two children's residential programs, totaling 22-beds (half of our capacity). The closure of our programs was not due to a lack of need; rather, it was a result of a combination of complex factors that have been eroding the system of care for a number of years.

Unfortunately, the children and families in need of this service have had to bear the brunt of the declining availability of these services. Many families have to wait months, and even sometimes years, to access these services. In the meantime, families often become dependent on Emergency Departments and the police interventions to help maintain their safety. Additionally, many families must make the very difficult decision to send their children out-of-state to get the help they so badly need.

I believe that LD 1745 takes a significant first step forward in better understanding and addressing the declining availability of Children's Residential Services here in Maine. Currently, agencies are struggling to maintain the baseline support needed to keep the doors open. This type of environment does not allow agencies to make the investments necessary to address the complex behavioral health needs of children and families. The shuttering of children's treatment programs over the last decade has not saved the state money, nor has it improved the lives of children and families. The results [closures] have done quite the opposite- the costs have been

shifted to our emergency departments, our police departments, homeless shelters, and the streets, none of which bear a good outcome.

I thank everyone for their time, their service, and commitment to investing in the wellbeing of the children and families of Maine. Should you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Justin Gifford

Executive Director, Becket Maine Inc.