



## In Support - Testimony for LD 2125

Good morning, Senator, Representative, and members of the Committee, and thank you for having me here today. My name is Ebrima Odeleye, and I go by Raheem. I am the Director of the KidsPeace Residential Program in Ellsworth, Maine, and I am here today to offer my strong support for LD 2125 and to speak on behalf of Maine's residential children, especially those currently placed out of state.

Maine's children deserve to grow, heal, and develop in their own communities—not hundreds or thousands of miles away. Unfortunately, Maine's ongoing shortage of in-state residential treatment beds has forced many children to be sent to programs in New Hampshire, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Arkansas, Utah, and beyond. This practice carries deeply harmful and lasting consequences for the children and their families.

Removing a child from their home state creates deep emotional wounds. Children separated from their primary caregivers and familiar surroundings experience profound grief, sadness, and disconnection. These experiences can contribute to conditions like Reactive Attachment Disorder, making it harder for children to form healthy relationships in the future.

When Maine lacks the appropriate level of care or step-down options, families are often forced into long-term or repeated institutionalization. Without access to local, community-based services, children experience extended out-of-home stays that delay stabilization, recovery, and reunification.

Not all residential programs across the country adhere to the same standards we enforce in Maine. Children placed out of state often face overcrowded environments, a lack of trauma-informed programming, and inconsistent education and case management. These practices retraumatize children and violate the core values of safety and dignity that we uphold here in Maine.

Children who are placed far away suffer academically and socially. Many lose consistent schooling, fall behind in credits, and face dropout rates up to three times higher than their peers. They are isolated from siblings, extended family, peers, and community culture—key relationships needed for healthy identity development.

Research is clear that children who spend extended time in institutional care are at higher risk for depression, anxiety, aggression, delinquency, and even early mortality later in life. Keeping children in their home state improves outcomes and reduces long-term costs associated with untreated trauma.

About two years ago, I worked with a young girl with developmental delays and behavioral challenges. Due to Maine's limited in-state capacity, she was placed in a residential facility in New Hampshire, hours away from her home in Washington County. Her mother, a single parent of three working two jobs, struggled to visit her because

the distance was too great and childcare too difficult to arrange. She told me how the separation has taken a toll on her daughter, her other children, and her own well-being.

Supporting LD 2125 means supporting Maine's children where they live, not where space happens to be available. It means rebuilding in-state capacity, stabilizing residential treatment programs, preventing unsafe out-of-state placements, and keeping children close to their families, schools, and communities.

I respectfully ask you to support LD 2125 so that Maine's children can remain supported by their families, connected to their communities, and guided by providers who understand their needs and their culture. Thank you for your time and for your commitment to Maine's children.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

**Ebrima 'Raheem' Odeleye, MS**

Director of KidsPeace Maine Residential Program