

LD 2125

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about an issue that strikes at the heart of who we are as a state: our responsibility to Maine's children, especially those with the most complex behavioral health needs. Maine has always prided itself on being a place where community matters, where neighbors look out for one another, and where we protect those who cannot protect themselves. Nowhere is that obligation clearer than in our duty to care for our most vulnerable youth.

Children's residential treatment facilities are critical to fulfilling that duty. These programs serve Maine children whose emotional, psychiatric, and behavioral needs are too severe to be safely or effectively met at home or in community settings. Research shows that youth who enter residential care frequently have significant trauma histories, severe behavioral challenges, and multiple barriers to accessing community-based services, making a 24-hour structured therapeutic environment both appropriate and necessary for their safety and development.

Maine's children deserve the same access to high-quality care as youth anywhere in the country. Residential treatment facilities provide intensive therapeutic services—counseling, behavioral support, family therapy, and comprehensive care around the clock—that simply cannot be replicated in outpatient or foster care settings.

These programs are often the turning point that stabilizes a child, protects them from harm, and allows them to return safely to their family or community.

But beyond the research, this is about values. How we care for Maine children in crisis reflects our identity as a state. Every child—no matter their circumstances—deserves safety, compassion, and a path forward. And when children have nowhere else to turn, residential treatment becomes more than a service; it becomes a lifeline.

We know that when we fail to invest in residential treatment, the consequences fall hardest on vulnerable youth: more emergency room visits and prolonged stays, more psychiatric hospitalizations, and more out-of-state placements that disconnect children from their families and communities. Maine cannot allow this. Our children deserve better, and our communities depend on strong, local, therapeutic placement options.

By strengthening and supporting residential treatment programs, Maine affirms that every child is worth investing in, especially those facing the steepest challenges. These youth are not problems to be sent away—they are Maine children who belong here, close to home, receiving care that honors their dignity and their potential.

Based on my direct experience trying to deliver these services, I respectfully urge the Legislature to immediately:

- 1. Strengthen funding for the service.** I appreciate OMS moving the rate review up to 2026 - and that rate review must be comprehensive - and include the following cost considerations: geographic cost difference, the regulatory and safety requirements unique to children, Cost of Compliance With Value-Based, Data-Driven Rate Models, not to mention Inflation, COLA Adjustments, capital improvements of infrastructure.
- 2. Preserve Licensed beds and capacity by establishment of an emergency fund.**
- 3. Invest in robust aftercare and reintegration support as required in the DOJ settlement agreement.**

4. Improve data collection and monitoring – we need a dashboard with real time availability of beds, acuity capacity and finding most appropriate placements.

5. Most importantly, Bridge funding during the system reform. We cannot afford to lose a single bed. There are only 5 facilities left. and if immediate action is not taken, ALL our children will end up going out of state.

In closing, residential treatment facilities provide a lifeline for children with the most complex needs—children who cannot safely be served in any other environment. By supporting these programs, Maine can ensure that every child has access to safety, healing, and a path toward a healthier future.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Rachel Bousquet

KidsPeace Executive Director of New England

Rachel.bousquet@kidspeace.org