

In-Support LD 2065

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is John McAnuff, and I am Sweetser's CFO. I am here today in support of LD 2065 and to express Sweetser's interest in partnering with the State to expand in-state psychiatric residential treatment capacity.

As you know, Maine currently lacks psychiatric residential treatment facility, or PRTF, capacity for youth with the most acute behavioral health needs. When appropriate in-state care is unavailable, children often languish in hospital emergency departments or are placed far from home, sometimes out of state. These options are disruptive for families and significantly more expensive for the State.

Sweetser has extensive experience operating intensive residential and psychiatric services. That experience has taught us two things: first, there is a clear clinical need for a PRTF in Maine; and second, these facilities are expensive to build, not because they are elaborate, but because they must be safe.

Youth served in a PRTF present higher risks related to elopement, self-harm, and harm to others. As a result, the building itself becomes part of the treatment and safety plan.

Construction costs are driven by requirements such as:

- Ligature- and tamper-resistant fixtures throughout resident areas
- Complex access control and egress systems, including secure entry vestibules and remotely controlled exits
- Continuous monitoring and security systems, including specialized anti-climb fencing for outdoor spaces
- Reinforced interior construction designed to withstand damage while protecting residents and staff

In addition, these facilities require infrastructure enhancements, including upgraded electrical service with full generator backup, specialized ventilation and cooling systems because operable windows are unsafe, fire protection upgrades, and full ADA accessibility. Many components also require specialized installation methods, which significantly increases labor costs.

Sweetser has been intentional about cost containment. This project reuses an existing building on our campus rather than pursuing new construction, which would likely exceed ten million dollars. We are retaining usable systems, selecting modest finishes, and making design choices that reduce cost wherever safety allows. Even so, the clinical and regulatory requirements of a PRTF create unavoidable capital expense.

LD 2065 is important because it recognizes that these kinds of costs are a major barrier to expanding PRTF capacity. Without state partnership, nonprofit providers cannot assume this level of financial risk, and these facilities will not be built.

Sweetser is interested in working collaboratively with the State to develop a PRTF that keeps children closer to home, reduces reliance on emergency departments and out-of-state placements, and fits within Maine's broader continuum of care. We view this as a partnership that must balance clinical quality, safety, and long-term sustainability.

LD 2065 is a thoughtful, targeted investment in Maine's children and in Maine-based solutions. I respectfully urge the Committee to support this bill.

Thank you for your time, and I would be happy to answer any questions.

John McAnuff

Chief Financial Officer