



**Testimony of Sarah Calder, MaineHealth
Governor’s Proposed Supplemental Budget
February 18, 2026**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and on Health and Human Services, I am Sarah Calder, Senior Government Affairs Director for MaineHealth, and I am here to testify in strong support of the funding included in the Supplemental Budget for a Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility, or PRTF. I also respectfully urge you to appropriate additional funds to stabilize Maine’s broader children’s residential behavioral health system.

MaineHealth is an integrated non-profit health care system that provides the full continuum of health care services to the residents of eleven counties in Maine and one in New Hampshire. As part of our vision of “Working Together So Maine’s Communities are the Healthiest in America,” MaineHealth, which includes MaineHealth Behavioral Health, is committed to creating a seamless system of behavioral healthcare across Maine, coordinating hospital psychiatric care with community-based treatment services, and providing better access to behavioral healthcare through integration with primary care.

A [recent study](#) published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that Maine ranks third worst in the nation for children with Medicaid who are boarding in hospital emergency departments for behavioral health concerns. Twenty-five percent of those visits resulted in boarding for three to seven days.

At MaineHealth alone, 284 children boarded in our Emergency Departments for longer than 48 hours last year. One child lived in a rural emergency department for three months. Emergency Departments are not treatment settings for youth. They are loud, chaotic, and isolating. Children are separated from their families, their education, and the therapeutic services they need, while receiving only the most basic medical stabilization.

In recent months, Spring Harbor Hospital has admitted seven youth whose inpatient stays exceeded 120 days, one of whom has been hospitalized for over 300 days, all awaiting residential placement. At times, these patients accounted for approximately 33% of the adolescent census and—at one point—more than 50% of the pediatric census.

The underlying issue is capacity. Maine has lost 78 percent of its children’s residential treatment beds since 2007. We cannot afford to lose more.

In 2018, the Office of Child and Family Services [identified](#) the absence of a secure children’s PRTF as a critical gap in Maine’s continuum of care. Eight years later, that gap remains. The Legislature took an important first step in 2024 by appropriating \$2 million to begin standing up a PRTF. The funding included in the proposed Supplemental Budget is the necessary next step to finally close this long-recognized gap for our most vulnerable children. We strongly support that investment.

At the same time, we urge you to go further. In-state residential providers have repeatedly shared that they cannot accept youth with the highest acuity needs under current MaineCare reimbursement structures. The rigid funding model does not allow providers to build the staffing models necessary to safely care for these young people. As a result, children are either stuck in hospitals or sent out of state – disconnected from their families and communities at critical developmental moments.

Stabilizing children's residential services through adding additional flexible funds to the Supplemental Budget would help preserve remaining capacity, support unique staffing models, and prevent further erosion of this fragile system.

The children languishing in emergency departments, living in psychiatric hospitals for months, or sent thousands of miles from home cannot wait any longer. We urge you to support the PRTF funding in the Supplemental Budget and to appropriate additional resources to stabilize and strengthen children's residential behavioral health services across Maine.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.