

Budget Testimony

Senators Rotundo and Baldacci, Representatives Sachs and Meyer, and honorable members of both the Appropriations & Health and Human Services Committees,

I'm Jayne Van Bramer and I'm the President & CEO of Sweetser, one of the largest providers of behavioral health in our state. Sweetser has over 500 staff and services reaching every corner of our state. Last year we served over 15,000 children, adults, and families and responded to over 26,000 phone calls from individuals needing treatment, hope, and support.

I'm speaking in favor of the behavioral health system portions of the DHHS budget.

We deeply appreciate the legislature and this administration for the past support around rates and other important initiatives aimed at creating better parity within our system. Workforce issues remain one of, if not, the top issue facing our system. The administration is addressing waitlist and workforce issues together in this budget by ensuring our ability to retain and attract quality and compassionate talent.

This is an opportunity to not only stabilize the behavioral health system in Maine, but to expand access to more Mainers in desperate need of care. And the need is there.

We have over 2,000 individuals on a waitlist, just for Sweetser services. 2,000 of your constituents, friends, family, and neighbors. Mainers who need our help.

Amongst Maine youth, rates of anxiety and depression are higher than the national average. The CDC just released new data saying 3 in 5 U.S. teen girls feel sad or hopeless. It's critical that we address children's mental health issues early on. It's prevention at its best. Our school-based clinicians served over 2,300 children last year. Programs like this operate at a loss year after year for providers like us and it's simply not sustainable without new solutions.

Streamlining the path to licensure, reducing administrative burdens, providing greater access to mental health screenings, ensuring safe and secure facilities for treatment, are just a few of the



other areas of focus as we navigate the challenges of serving our state and maximizing the resources you allocate.

Securing the mental health and substance use treatment Mainers need is about a state that values its people. We've seen it firsthand with our clients, when Mainers receive evidence-based treatment and support, they can give their full selves to their careers, family, and community.

We appreciate the Governor, Commissioner, and legislature for the continued commitment to our shared goal of strengthening behavioral health. As part of the Behavioral Health Community Collaborative and the Maine Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services, we are here to be a collective resource for you all in your deliberations. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



Jayne Van Bramer, President & CEO