

In- Support LD 2002

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and honorable members of the Education & Cultural Affairs Committee,

I'm Sweetser's Medical Director, Dr. Marc Kaplan and I've been with Sweetser for nearly 30 years. I am here today to speak in favor of LD 2002 An Act to Provide Incentives to Schools that Contract for Certain Social Work and Family Therapy Services.

In Maine, there are barriers that prevent children from accessing mental health counseling outside of school.

- 1) Maine is largely a rural state so often no private practice or clinic-based therapists are within a one-hour drive or less from where the family lives. If there are private practices or clinics within a one-hour drive or less, there are often significant wait lists.
 - 2) Many families have significant transportation barriers.
- 2022 data showed that in Maine we have approximately 200,000 K-12 students enrolled in our public schools.

Among those 200,000 students...

- 14,000 students carry a diagnosis of Major Depressive Disorder
- 4,000 of those students did not receive any treatment.
- 2,468 students are identified as having an Emotional Disturbance.
- 3,000 students are diagnosed with Substance Use Disorder.

Children with these disorders often demonstrate poor academic achievement and increased behavioral problems in school. Providing educational modifications along with expert counseling for the child and family, often results in behavioral and academic improvements.

Schools are the ideal place to diagnose and treat children with mental, emotional and substance use disorders. They are natural settings for both the children and their families to access support. The National Council for Mental Wellbeing believes that young people are more likely to access mental health services in schools than anywhere else. Schools provide a space that is accessible, timely, and efficient. School based services provide opportunities to reach the largest number of children possible.

Providers like Sweetser not only obtain family permission to treat their children, but seek their active participation in the healing journey. This ensures both children and their families receive treatment and support that they so often need together.

As no mental health challenge exists in isolation, our clinicians are able to work with families to identify other solutions in the continuum of care that might be needed. Families are able to access further supports and resources because of our presence on school campuses. This reduces the barriers to accessing various types of care and additional services within the behavioral health system.

I urge this committee to consider preventing such a critical service from possible closure. Thank you for your time and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

Dr. Marc Kaplan, DO
Medical Director