

IN SUPPORT OF LD 2214

An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of both the Appropriations & Financial Affairs and Health & Human Services Committees,

I'm Jayne Van Bramer, President & CEO of Sweetser and today I'm here to speak to the urgent need for prioritizing children's mental health in the Governor's supplemental budget.

By now you've all heard the harrowing statistics around the number of children being sent out of state for treatment based on their high acuity level and lack of available secure treatment facilities in our state.

Far too many Maine kids are in residential treatment facilities outside Maine, some children are as far away as Arkansas, Utah, and Illinois. We can bring them home where the care is closer to natural support systems and even save the state money.

We need to meet this moment with the necessary resources, taking some of the \$100 million plus surplus in the Governor's budget being set aside on top of the maxed out rainy-day fund and invest in Maine's next generation now.

Hospital organizations like MaineHealth have children languishing in their emergency departments because there are no appropriate discharge options. Providers like Sweetser can't take them because providers are not equipped to handle the level of secure care needed to protect both the child and the staff who care for them.

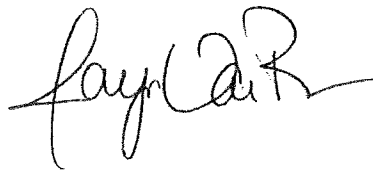
Maine is an outlier. Approximately 35 states operate Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities or PRTFs. Psychiatric residential treatment facilities are secure therapeutic residences providing non-hospital inpatient psychiatric care and treatment to youth with MaineCare/Medicaid coverage under the age of 21. These non-hospital settings are less restrictive than hospital settings and are a safe alternative for treating children who have a less acute psychiatric illness but still require a locked structured residential setting due to their serious emotional disorder. Sweetser is a large children's residential provider and frequently we have to reject referrals of youth who are too dysregulated to function in an open-door residential setting even with intensive support. These trauma-stricken youth are subject to trafficking and/or running away

and require the oversight of a physician directed treatment plan typically for medication management.

After passing LD 181 last year, we all await the report that was due last month that would detail the progress being made regarding a rate structure and regulations that would enable providers like us to even consider operating a PRTF. Beyond just needing the report though, we need action. Aside from a favorable rate structure to properly operate a PRTF we need the ability to construct such a secure facility. Capital costs need to be provided upfront or reimbursed. Luckily, in Sweetser's case we could convert existing buildings to fit the need, but it would still take an estimated few million dollars to do so.

I know you get it. I know you see the clear gap in our service system and what is needed to develop a more comprehensive system of care for our youth. Now is the time to fund it. Now is the time for specific and clear actionable steps to address it in this budget. Appreciate your time and the important work both of these committees are doing for our behavioral health system. Happy to answer any questions you have.

Sincerely,



Jayne Van Bramer
President & CEO