

***In- Support
LD 210 Budget
Adult Mental Health***

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

I'm Joanne Grant, Sweetser's Chief Growth Officer. Sweetser is part of a coalition of partners including the Behavioral Health Community Collaborative and the Maine Alliance for Addiction and Mental Health Services. I'm speaking in favor of the budget, but with a few suggestions to strengthen greater access to services.

The number one barrier to your constituents accessing mental health and substance use treatment, the number one reason for the thousands of Mainers that await treatment and support, is workforce. 10,000+ Mainers should not be on a wait list for therapy.

Every Mainer deserves access to quality treatment and support in an effort to prevent utilization of more costly higher levels of care. Addressing this current workforce crisis is a top priority for our coalition and should be for this legislature as well.

Waitlists will only grow if we do nothing this year. If we don't take deliberate steps towards meaningful change and action. At a bare minimum, this budget should reflect a commitment to finding long term solutions to address behavioral health workforce challenges.

What we need is a blueprint that legislators like yourself, DHHS officials, and providers like, can use to navigate out of turbulent waters and ensure adequate staffing levels to match the level of need across our state.

The goal should be to bring stakeholders together to evaluate other state solutions and test the feasibility of strategies to make recommendations on a whole host of areas including but not limited to:

- Incentivizing a pipeline of Maine's next generation of clinicians through initiatives like enhancing the loan repayment program and implementing stipends for field placements and internships.
- Empowering providers to take on an enhanced training role to reduce barriers, costs, administrative burden, and increase timeliness of transition into workforce.
- Evaluating reimbursement rates to support greater recruitment and retention given inflation, competition, and acuity of those we are trying to serve.
- And other creative and innovative proposals to guide your next steps.

You will see a proposal in the coming weeks that we hope you will consider that would complement your past efforts while ensuring an issue of this magnitude is given the proper attention it deserves. It will also serve as a bridge to hopefully buy some time to better budgetary environments to fund these critical ideas.

Thank you for your time and consideration in your deliberations.

Sincerely,

Joanne Grant
Chief Growth Officer