

*April 8, 2025*

**Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Health & Human Services Committee,**

I'm Jayne Van Bramer, Sweetser's President and CEO. I am here today to speak in favor of LD1426, a Resolve to Expand Child Assertive Community Treatment.

**Our children in Maine are struggling.** There is universal acknowledgment that we are in the midst of a youth mental health crisis.

The concerning trends include over one-third of our high school students report feeling sad or hopeless for weeks. The rates of anxiety and depression in Maine's youth exceed national averages and more Maine children have experienced two or more Adverse Childhood Experiences. These aren't just numbers on a spreadsheet, they are real Maine children, Maine families, hurting.

Without the right support; without easy access to treatment; children experiencing or at risk for mental health challenges face an increased likelihood of requiring higher and more expensive levels of care. The cost of this legislation is a drop in the bucket compared to the costs and risks of hospitalization, incarceration, residential care, and other long-term strains on our system.

We know that half of all mental illnesses begin by age 14 yet only 49% of the children in Maine will receive treatment and even less will receive evidence-based interventions. That is, treatment that works.

**A Resolve to Expand Child Assertive Community Treatment** sponsored by Rep. Lori Gramlich is designed to change that.

Child ACT is an evidence-based treatment designed to support children to remain in their homes and in their communities with intensive support.

The Department of Justice specifically noted Sweetser's Child ACT team as a benefit to our state. When previously, it was cited as a gap in Maine's service system.

Child ACT brings comprehensive treatment and services directly to youth with significant mental health challenges and their families in their homes—so they can remain in school and together. We use a strength-based model that instills the youth and their families with hope and goals for the future and a plan for getting there.

Accessing behavioral health services in Maine is difficult. Workforce is the primary barrier to service expansion because we can't have services without staff. What made Sweetser's Child ACT team viable was the addition of incentives which supported the training, hiring and retention of Child ACT staff. Our legislation seeks 320K to expand this wonderful service and create new Child ACT teams in Lewiston and Bangor- both high needs and underserved areas.

Now is the time to strengthen Maine's behavioral health system for our next generation. Together we must meet this moment with leadership and expand access to programs that work backed with the resources needed to properly staff them. The time to invest in our children's future is now.

Thank you and I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.