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April 8, 2025

Testimony of Rep. Lori K. Gramlich presenting

LD 1426, Resolve, to Expand Child Assertive Community Treatment
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and honorable members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Lori Gramlich. I have the privilege of representing the lovely seaside community of Old Orchard Beach in House District 131 and the distinct honor of serving as assistant House majority leader. Thank you for the opportunity to introduce ***LD 1426, Resolve, to Expand Child Assertive Community Treatment.***

Child Assertive Community Treatment, or Child ACT, is a model of intensive community-based outpatient treatment. Child ACT teams bring together a multidisciplinary team of providers that support children with severe behavioral impairments in a comprehensive and around-the-clock way. Child ACT teams work with children who are at risk of needing residential services and who have not benefited from lower levels of treatment intervention. Importantly, Child ACT keeps kids in their own homes and communities, where they benefit from their natural support systems, while they access the services they need.

As some of you may know, I am a Licensed Master Social Worker and have been practicing in the state of Maine for nearly 35 years. As a social worker, advocate and now as a four-term state legislator, I have focused on ensuring that all Mainers have access to the mental and behavioral health care they need - especially our young people. As returning members of the committee may recall, I have sponsored a number of bills during my time in the Legislature to address our broken mental health care system, including my bills to "Bring the Kids Home" - bills which sought to ensure that Maine children will no longer be sent out of state, away from their loved ones and homes, simply because they cannot access services appropriate to their level of need in their own communities or even just within their own home state.

LD 1426 is a natural extension of that work, because ACT teams are an evidence-based intervention that can help keep individuals, including children, with severe mental and behavioral health challenges in a community-based setting.

Despite being such an important component of the care continuum, there is only one Child ACT team currently operating in Maine. Sweetser is here today to talk about its critically important work in this arena, and I believe they can be a helpful resource to the committee as it considers this proposal. Sweetser's Child ACT team currently serves Mainers ages 5 to 20 years old within a 25-mile radius of

Saco - so while their program's positive impact is absolutely laudable, they are not currently able to fully meet the needs of southern Maine residents, let alone those who live in other parts of the state.

LD 1426 would create two Child ACT team pilot programs, one in the Lewiston area and another in the Bangor area. These pilot programs would begin to expand these important services to parts of the state that are badly underserved. It will also give us actionable information on how best to continue our work to improve access to care for those children who need the increased level of support that Child ACT teams provide. The bill requires the Department of Health and Human Services to report back to this committee following the conclusion of the pilots to describe the outcomes and make recommendations that members of the Legislature will then have the opportunity to incorporate as we consider future legislative action.

We know that investment in effective interventions like ACT teams actually save money by improving outcomes. The cost of these pilot programs is modest and will pay dividends, both in the form of improved outcomes and reduced need for more intensive interventions, as well as in the form of reduced suffering, stronger families and brighter futures.

Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of this proposal. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have for me, and I am also happy to defer questions to the providers here today who can speak in more detail to the mechanics and importance of Child ACT teams.