



Good morning, Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyer, and good members of the HHS committee.

I am Betsy Sweet, and I am speaking today on behalf of the Behavioral Health Community Collaborative. We are a group of seven community mental health agencies and together serve over 70% of the Maine people who seek mental health treatment. I'm here today to speak in strong support of LD 1443 — because it addresses something essential: shared responsibility.

As you know from the report you received from DHHS earlier this year, this is not our first attempt to address the issue of late payments and contracts. We *greatly* appreciate the efforts of the Department and are very compassionate about the lack of workforce, etc. We, too, live that every day as we deliver the services vulnerable Mainers need most.

I want to be very clear that this bill isn't about casting blame or pointing fingers. It's about recognizing that when there are delays in the contracting process and payments — delays that no one wants, and often no one individual is responsible for — those delays still have consequences. And right now, those consequences are falling squarely on the shoulders of nonprofit service providers and the people they serve.

Let's be clear: these are the organizations doing the work we all care about. They're providing behavioral health services, housing assistance, support to families in crisis — the backbone of our safety net. They show up every day with compassion and professionalism, often with shoestring budgets, and keep their doors open out of deep commitment to their communities.

When a contract gets delayed by the state — whether it's an administrative holdup, a legal review, or any of the dozens of things that can slow the process down — these providers still have to pay rent. They still have to make payroll. And in many cases, to do that, they're taking out loans and lines of credit just to stay afloat. That's not sustainable, and frankly, it's not fair.

This bill simply says: if the state is late in paying, the state should be responsible for the costs that delay creates. That's not a radical idea — it's just good stewardship. It's about making sure the burden doesn't fall on the nonprofits who are least able to carry it, or worse, on the people who depend on their services. If, as the report suggests, it is happening infrequently — that is great. It won't be a burden and won't have much of a fiscal note.

Again, this isn't about fault. It's about fairness and accountability. It's about making sure the system works — not just in theory, but in practice — for the organizations we rely on, and ultimately, for the people who rely on our services.

Please support this bill. Let's make sure we're not unintentionally penalizing the organizations who are holding up our communities. Thank you for your time, your service, and your consideration. As I hope I let you know every time – I appreciate you!

The members of the Behavioral Health Community Collaborative are Sweetser, Inc., Opportunity Alliance, Volunteers of America, Shalom House, KidsPeace, Spurwink, Community Concepts