



# BECKET MAINE

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## **Testimony of Justin Gifford, Becket Maine Inc.**

### **Speaking in Support of LD 2125**

Submitted to the Committee on Health and Human Services

**January 27, 2026**

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#### **Distinguished Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:**

I submit this testimony in urgent support of **LD 2125: An Act to Sustain Access to Children's Residential Care Services.**

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I want to be clear: without immediate action, Maine risks losing essential components of its children's behavioral health system. I strongly support establishing an emergency rate determination process for children's residential care so that reimbursement rates reflect the actual, rapidly rising cost of delivering safe and effective treatment. I also urge passage of the one-time funding necessary to create an emergency stabilization fund—because for many providers, including my own organization, the threat of bed closures or full facility shutdowns remains a constant threat.

Children's residential facilities represent the highest tier of mental health support available outside of psychiatric hospitalization. The youth served in these programs are among the most vulnerable in our state. Nearly all have histories of multiple emergency department stays, repeated psychiatric hospitalizations, and frequent law enforcement involvement. Some have experienced detainment in correctional settings—not because they need punishment, but because no appropriate mental health placement was available when they needed it.

Over the last decade, my agency has been forced to close 33 children's residential beds across three facilities—including 22 beds in the past five years alone. Today, we operate just two children's programs, totaling 22 beds. One of these is the **only remaining facility in Maine** specializing in treatment for problem sexual behavior—an incredibly resource-intensive and critically needed service that cannot be allowed to disappear.

The factors that led to these closures continue to place the remaining programs at real and immediate risk. Reimbursement rates have fallen drastically behind the cost of goods, staffing, and

essential clinical supports. For example, in 2004 the daily Room and Board rate for our PSB program was \$116.43; 22 years later, the rate for the same program is just \$51.94 per day.

Workforce shortages remain severe and persistent, and the needs and acuity of children entering care continue to escalate—creating increasingly dangerous situations for both staff and other residents. Additional pressures include:

- Non-reimbursable bed-hold days
- Rising staff injuries resulting from client aggression, driving insurance costs to unsustainable levels
- Frequent police involvement tied to behavioral health emergencies
- High and escalating accreditation expenses
- Significant property destruction requiring constant facilities repair
- Anticipated increased utilization of FMLA when Maine's Paid Family and Medical Leave program takes effect in May, requiring us to hire additional staff to cover temporary vacancies

Without swift legislative intervention, Maine will face further loss of beds, longer waitlists, reduced access to intensive treatment, and more children being diverted to emergency departments, police custody, or out-of-state placements. The system is already strained; it cannot withstand further erosion.

I thank the Committee for your time, your dedication, and your commitment to Maine's children and families. I cannot stress enough that the decisions before you will directly impact whether crucial residential services remain available in our state. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

**Sincerely,**

**Justin Gifford**

Executive Director, Becket Maine Inc.