

In-Support LD 2125

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and thank you, Rep. McCabe, for sponsoring LD 2125. My name is Jayne Van Bramer, President and CEO of Sweetser, and I am here in strong support of this legislation.

Before coming to Sweetser's residential program and special purpose school, one young person felt trapped in a constant cycle of reactivity. He described himself as acting before thinking. His emotions escalated quickly, and he viewed the world as a hostile place. He believed adults were "out to get him," and when things became hard, his response was to run rather than face the problem.

Today, his story is very different. After time in our therapeutic residential setting, he describes himself as being in a much calmer headspace. He has learned how to pause, think through his actions, and regulate his emotions. His relationship with adults has also changed — where there was once fear and mistrust, there is now understanding and connection.

Several elements of the residential environment made this possible. Being in a healthy, structured setting allowed him to step away from negative influences and focus on his own growth. Time on the campus farm became grounding for him, especially the bond he formed with a horse named Tricky, which helped him feel calm and safe. Working in the mechanic shop gave him purpose and pride, reconnecting him to his roots and providing a positive outlet for his energy.

This young person is no longer running away from his future — he is running toward it. Inspired by the care he received, he now hopes to pursue a career in nursing so he can help others the way he was helped. Stories like his show us that residential treatment works — but only if it exists.

Maine's Children's Residential Care Facility system is in crisis. Over the past year alone, 111 CRCF beds were permanently closed. In April of 2025, two licensed CRCF providers closed, reducing in-state capacity by another 33 beds — from 185 to just 152.

If we fail to stabilize this system, we will lose more programs serving our most vulnerable youth.

Children will wait longer in inappropriate settings, rely more heavily on emergency departments and hospitals, or be sent out of state — all at a higher cost and with worse outcomes. An emergency stabilization fund would help prevent additional closures, protect the programs that remain, and give the state time to implement long-term solutions.

We appreciate the recent MaineCare decision to prioritize rate setting, but without urgent action, more children like the young person I described today will lose access to care that changes lives. I urge you to act now to stabilize Maine's children's residential care system and ensure that children who need this care can receive it — here at home, when they need it most.

Thank you for your time and for your consideration of this proposal.

Jayne Van Bramer
President & CEO