

In-Support LD 2065

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Justin Chenette and I'm the Chief Communications Officer at Sweetser.

It's great seeing so many familiar faces I had the honor of serving with during my 8 years here.

Thank you to Senator Ingwersen for introducing this bill and to the many bipartisan co-sponsors, including Rep. Meyer, Senator Moore, Rep. Daigle, and Rep. Gramlich. This committee, the legislature, and DHHS have provided real leadership in acknowledging the plight of families and the lack of in-state care for this vulnerable population.

In 2024, when DHHS put out a request for providers to create Maine's 1st psychiatric residential treatment facility, only one answered the call. Sweetser stepped up to meet the moment and, after being awarded the RFP last year, has been working collaboratively with various stakeholders to make this a reality.

This project represents a unifying solution to the pressing needs of Maine's most at-risk youth and reaffirms our shared goal of strengthening Maine families by keeping them together through the healing journey and being fiscally prudent with taxpayer dollars.

By simply upgrading an existing building to this standard of care, we are saving the state the expense of building new, and long-term, there will be savings by keeping tax dollars local and without the expensive travel costs.

Here's where we stand:

- **\$2 million** has already been appropriated by the legislature as a down payment to begin construction and start this program.
- **\$2.5 million** will come from Sweetser. We are accomplishing this through daily fundraising efforts. We held a gala in the Fall, we have a fundraiser Saturday, a radiothon next week, and a golf tournament in June. When construction costs were increasing, Sweetser once again stepped up to the plate and increased our commitment to the project by **\$500,000**. Sweetser is doing our part.
- This leaves **\$3.4 million** needed to complete this **\$7.9 million project**.

Sweetser has also been actively trying to find cost savings wherever we can. We have been working with our construction partners to review every item to brainstorm alternatives to bring costs down. Some of that has yielded to real savings, but ultimately, there are things we can't compromise on, like safety, security, and creating a true therapeutic setting.

Don't get hung up on the number in the bill today as we work to exhaust all other potential funding options. **For your work session, we will either have a clear number or come back not needing this legislation.** Since the big game is coming up, I'll use a football analogy. With just a few points needed, all we need is a field goal from the department to find a funding mechanism. If we miss that, we need the legislature to score a touchdown to get this bill and get this project across the finish line. If neither happens in the next few months, the game is over, and this facility will not be created. Maine families from York County to Washington County to Aroostook County will continue to see their youth shipped halfway across the country for more expensive care, without the natural supports of loved ones close by. Thank you for your time, leadership, and consideration.

Justin Chenette
Chief Communications Officer