In-Support LD 2065

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today, and thank you, Senator Ingwersen, for sponsoring LD 2065. My name is Jayne Van Bramer, President and CEO of Sweetser, and I am here in strong support of this legislation.

I'm here to ask for additional funding and to explain why the projected construction costs for the planned Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility, or PRTF, are higher than the initial estimate—and why those increases are necessary to ensure safety, compliance, and quality care for Maine's most vulnerable youth.

In 2024, at the committee's request, Maine's legislators included two million dollars in the budget to support the renovation of an existing building to create a PRTF. That figure was an early internal estimate developed by Sweetser before we engaged an architectural firm or general contractor, before a detailed design and cost analysis was completed, and before the state's PRTF RFP was distributed. That figure also did not reflect the funds Sweetser committed to raising through philanthropy.

Since that estimate was developed more than two years ago, construction costs have risen significantly. The industry has experienced sustained inflation. Tariffs have contributed to sharp increases in the cost of steel, lumber, mechanical systems, and electrical components. At the same time, shortages in skilled labor—particularly in specialized trades—have driven up labor costs and extended construction timelines. These market conditions alone have substantially increased project costs.

In addition, a Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility is not comparable to a standard residential or commercial renovation. PRTFs require highly specialized design features to ensure safety and meet clinical standards. These include ligature-resistant fixtures, reinforced doors and windows, tamper-resistant mechanical and electrical systems, secure yet therapeutic environments, and enhanced HVAC systems to support air quality and infection control. These features are essential for protecting youth and staff and are required to meet standards in psychiatric care.

The facility must also comply with federal, state, and local regulations, including life safety codes, accessibility standards, fire protection requirements, and behavioral health–specific licensing criteria. These requirements are non-negotiable and apply regardless of the size of the facility.

To operate safely 24 hours a day, the building also requires robust mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems, emergency power generation, security and monitoring systems, and fire alarm and suppression systems designed for healthcare occupancy. Redundancy and backup systems add cost, but they are critical to uninterrupted care.

Site-related conditions have also contributed to increased expenses. Utility upgrades, grading needs, and unforeseen issues such as asbestos are common in this type of renovation project. Extended permitting and regulatory review timelines have further increased general conditions, insurance, and project administration costs.

It's important to note that these investments are not optional or excessive.

In closing, our revised construction budget reflects the true cost of delivering a safe, compliant, and clinically appropriate Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility. Supporting this bill and ultimately this construction is essential to ensuring that Maine's youth receive the high-quality behavioral health care in state they both need and deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jayne Van Bramer
President & CEO

Memo

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To	Jayne Van Bremer	**Date**	1/26/26
From	Becca Casey	**Project No.**	25042
Subject	Cost Drivers List	**Project Name**	Sweetser PRTF

PRTF Construction Cost Drivers

General

- Costs of all things construction have increased significantly in the last few years.
- This building is optimally located for the use, within the large Sweetser campus where staff and support are always present, and surrounded by nature and 250 acres for a healing environment. *While it is an older building, and upgrades are required to bring it to the next level of care– Sweetser has also made numerous decisions that save cost vs. a new building, including maintaining existing boilers in good condition, choosing medium risk hardware in fully supervised areas, and opting for paint accents over wall protection sheet, to name a few.*
    - *Comparison: new construction cost range +/-$1m per psych bed >> over $10m*
- This project in particular is affected by numerous high-cost items driven by specialized equipment, regulatory requirements, and labor intensity.

- **Risk assessment and design for psychiatric patients;** While a residential use, the anticipated resident population poses risk of elopement, potential for intent to harm (oneself or others), damage to property demanding an environment designed to keep residents and staff safe.

ELECTRICAL & COMMUNICATIONS

What goes into that (in addition to Infrastructure)?

- Security systems
    - Including camera & monitoring system (for supervision of areas not in direct view of the staff workstation).
    - Security Fencing at the activity yard requires specialized anti-climb mesh, of >12' height, an embedded ground installation detail + gate hardware.
- Safety hardware includes
    - **Ligature resistant door hardware** throughout, and **door top sensor/alarms** at bedrooms
    - **Complexity of access controls & egress;** Access controls for medication room and staff areas require badge access system. Entry vestibules must create sally port conditions (interconnected door functions), and other exits require special hardware that can be released remotely in the event of fire or other disaster (to control for likelihood of false/nuisance alarms) are a few examples.
    - **Tamper-proof;**
        - Fixtures, devices, trim and accessories in resident areas must be specialized to reduce risk of harm or sabotage. [$ saved by using standard items outside those areas]

- Electrical and communications items including: outlets, light fixtures, sensors and switches, life-safety devices such as smoke and fire detectors, cameras, etc. to be ligature and tamper resistant.
- HVAC [heating/cooling/air-conditioning] system devices including thermostats as well as all diffusers/grills.
- Plumbing fixtures such as toilets, sinks, showers, faucets, and drain covers.
- Fasteners; any screws that may be visible must be special tamper-resistant heads.

- Interior finishes; while those selected for this project are modest within the spectrum of appropriate finishes – they must all meet safety criteria including:
  - Drywall on interior walls is special for impact resistance installed over plywood for durability.
  - Enclosures; to protect electronics (TV) or other standard/non-specialized devices.
  - Sealants; special pick-proof caulk is required at seams and where different surfaces or materials meet.
  - Labor: special installation such as mechanical as well as adhesive fastening for things like wall-base to assure it cannot be removed (potentially weaponized).
- **Infrastructure;**
  - **Electrical service itself must be upgraded and backed up by a generator.** This requires site work, new generator and transformer, upgrading the panels within the building, and running new wiring to assure everything serving this sensitive use is up to new codes with required redundancies.
  - **Mechanical ventilation must be added for air quality and to meet codes;** The existing building has operable windows – which are not practical given safety restrictions (and orders of magnitude more expansive for secure behavioral health safe ones). Note that existing heating units are able to be maintained.
    - New equipment, ductwork, registers and grills.
  - Sprinkler system modifications.
- Accessibility accommodations
  - Handicapped accessibility is a requirement of the code. Multiple access points on a sloped site results in significant **construction of ramps to achieve required accessibility to the satisfaction of the AHJ** (authority having jurisdiction). New ADA toilet/shower rooms, wider doors throughout.
- Building Envelope;
  - Additional **insulation required to meet current code minimums.** *Continuous exterior insulation added, re-insulate attic for thoroughness and b/c have to remove existing to complete work.*
  - New siding & trim *(Considered but could not be separated/delayed as maintenance cost due to need for coordination with new wall thickness and windows at added insulation).*
  - **Behavioral health safe windows** required due to risk level. *Note that this project proposes a combination of custom BH safe interior sashes with stock residential impact resistant exterior windows for significant cost savings*

- Labor; example: to meet impact resistance, even exterior windows have significantly more attachments than typical construction

ABBREVIATED BULLET LIST:

Electrical, Communications and other risk abating features:

- Security systems
  - camera & monitoring system
  - Fencing at the activity yard
- Safety hardware includes
  - Ligature resistant door hardware
  - Access controls / badge access system.
  - Door hardware complexity requiring electrical and communications;
    - sally port conditions (interconnected door functions)
    - remote release egress
    - door top sensors/alarm
  - Fixtures, devices, trim and accessories tamper-proof & ligature resistant
    - Electrical and communications: outlets, light fixtures, sensors, switches, life-safety devices such as smoke and fire detectors, cameras, etc.
    - HVAC [heating/cooling/air-conditioning] system devices: thermostats, diffusers/grills.
    - Plumbing fixtures: toilets, sinks, faucets, showers, and drain covers
    - Sprinkler heads
  - Interior finishes:
    - Enclosures; to protect electronics (TV) or other standard/non-specialized devices.
    - Fasteners; tamper-resistant screws
    - Sealants; special pick-proof caulk all exposed seams
    - Labor: special installation screws + adhesive fastening for wall base, other items.

- Infrastructure;
  - Electrical service upgrade
  - Backup generator
  - Mechanical ventilation and cooling.
- Accessibility
  - wheelchair ramps to front and back doors
  - fully accessible toilet rooms
  - increased width all doors
- Building Envelope;
  - Insulation to meet energy code
  - Behavioral health safe windows
    - Labor; more attachments than typical window