

In-Support LD 2212

Senator Rotundo, Rep. Gattine, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of both the Appropriations and Health & Human Services Committees, I'm Justin Chenette, Chief Communications Officer at Sweetser.

Today I'm speaking in favor of the Governor's supplemental budget, specifically the HHS section in relation to providing funding for the creation of Maine's 1st psychiatric residential treatment facility.

Sweetser deeply appreciates the administration for providing leadership in acknowledging the plight of families and the lack of in-state care for Maine's most at-risk youth. The legislature, guided by your bipartisan recommendations from both of your committees, has demonstrated a clear commitment to making this project happen.

In 2024, when DHHS put out a request for providers to create a PRTF, 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.

Currently, around 70 youth with the highest level of need are out of state to receive care, as far away as Oklahoma, because we are an outlier in not offering such a program here. 100 more youth are on a waitlist to be sent out of state, and dozens languish in emergency rooms, sometimes months on end, because there is no therapeutic place for them to go.

Here's where we stand today on a solution:

- **\$2 million** has already been appropriated by the legislature as a down payment to begin construction and start this program this year.
- **\$2.5 million** will come from Sweetser, something you wouldn't find anyone else willing or able to do.
- This leaves a **\$3.4 million** gap needed to complete this **\$7.9 million project**, which is reflected in this supplemental budget.

In this case, the supplemental budget represents both a moral document, reflecting our shared goal of strengthening Maine families by keeping them together through the healing journey, and it also reflects a shared commitment to being fiscally responsible with taxpayer dollars, with cost savings from not building new and reducing the estimated \$30 million spent annually to ship kids out of state.

Without passing this critical funding, Maine families from Kittery to Eastport to Madawaska will continue to see their youth shipped halfway across the country for more expensive care, without the natural support of loved ones close by, or continue to languish in emergency rooms. Youth and families in each of your districts would benefit from such a facility, and frankly, deserve access to one. To recap, approving these one-time capital construction funds ensures the state:

- Saves & keeps taxpayer dollars in-state
- Strengthens oversight of the facilities these kids are in by having it close by
- And keeps Maine families together by preventing family separation

This supplemental budget appropriation gets this project across the finish line. Together, we can truly build a home for hope and make a multi-generational investment in Maine's future. Thank you for your time, your leadership, and your continued efforts to ensure Maine's most at-risk youth get a fair shot at a brighter future and are not forgotten.

Justin Chenette, Chief Communications Officer