



BEHAVIORAL HEALTH COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE

Working together to promote quality lives

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson and good members of the HCIFS Committee. My name is Betsy Sweet and I am testifying in favor of LD 2208 on behalf of the Behavioral Health Community Collaborative. In all health care – but particularly in mental health - the people we serve depend on stability in their health coverage to stay well.

When someone is dealing with anxiety, depression, trauma, or substance use disorder, the last thing they should have to worry about is whether their insurance will disappear because of a change in Washington. We know that mental health healing requires consistency. It requires trust. And it requires uninterrupted access to therapy, medication, and community supports. When coverage lapses, even for a month, people backslide — not because they failed, but because the system failed them.

Already the behavioral health system is strained. We are losing services, capacity, residential beds for children and adults and when we look to what will happen with the massive cuts and program changes that will take effect later this year, the picture is bleak.

These two funds — the Health Care Premium Stabilization Fund and the MaineCare Federal Response Fund — are not abstract policy tools. They are lifelines. They ensure that when federal subsidies shift or federal contributions drop, Maine people – particularly those with mental health challenges - aren't the ones who pay the price with the downward trajectory of their healing.

These funds keep people safe. They keep families together; they keep people out of jail or languishing in emergency rooms. They help our mental health workforce stay afloat in a system that is already stretched to its limits.

And I just want to take a minute to put this in perspective. This has a huge price tag – but is it really “unaffordable”?

In the four decades I have been advocating here in this building it is said *every year* that there is not enough money to do all the necessary things. But it is not true.

When I first testified in this legislature in 1983 there were 13 billionaires in the US
Today there are over 900.

In the last 20 years 79 TRILLION dollars have been shifted from the bottom 90% to the top 1%.

In 2023 alone, according to the Rand Corporation, 39 trillion was shifted from the bottom 90% to the top 1%.

If income distribution had remained the same over the last 40 years, the Maine median income would be DOUBLE what it is today. It would answer the affordability crisis and we would have money in our budget.

And every constituent of yours and the vulnerable Mainers my clients serve feel this truth in their bones. And every poll reflects that people are ready and even desperate for law makers at every level to take bold action.

Because where we are is due to policy. Not some inevitable drift over which we have no control. So when we say there is no money – I want us all to demand to know - really? Is that really the problem – or is it that we are allowing money to be extracted from real needs of Maine people and the people of this country to go to the ultra-elite. And is there anything we can do in Maine to stop this transfer of dollars away from the people who need it.

I want to thank Speaker Fecteau for saying “Yes. We can do something”. This bill is a critical step for both fiscal responsibility and bringing political and moral leadership to shine the light on what is happening and, most importantly, to ensure that it is NOT the most vulnerable people in Maine who pay the price for what is happening in our economy.

I urge you to support these funds and protect the health and dignity of the people you and we serve.

Thank you.

The members of the Behavioral Health Community Collaborative are Sweetser, Inc., Opportunity Alliance, Shalom House, KidsPeace, Spurwink, Community Concepts