

In- Support LD 2002

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and honorable members of the Education & Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is John McAnuff and I have been the Chief Financial Officer at Sweetser since 2022. Prior to that, I was the Chief Financial Officer at Spurwink Services since 2007. I am here today to speak in favor of LD 2002 An Act to Provide Incentives to Schools that Contract for Certain Social Work and Family Therapy Services.

LD 2002 will enable community agencies to continue to provide much-needed mental health prevention services to children and families on school campuses and in their homes.

The service is not currently working financially. It neither works for the community agencies nor does it work for the clinicians. And for rural school districts, affordability of providing these critical services can be a barrier.

Sweetser's Board of Directors and Senior Leadership is committed to providing this service which has proven to reduce barriers for children to receive treatment in the public-school setting. In fiscal year 2024, Sweetser's Board approved a deficit in this program of \$342,000.

Sweetser's School-Based program lost \$560,000 on \$4.4 million in revenue in 2022, lost \$376,000 on \$3.5 million revenue in 2023 and has lost \$438,000 on \$1 million in revenue through the first 5 months of fiscal year 2024. These negative margins are unsustainable.

The underlying reasons for this center around a mismatch between the productivity expectations built into the rates and the amount of unbillable time that is part of the service. The MaineCare rate works in an outpatient setting where the therapist can schedule back-to-back appointments. The school-based setting is different. The community-based clinicians co-located in the school are part of the school community and act as members of the student's team. As testimony mentioned earlier, there is a long list of non-billable activities that ultimately are required if a clinician is to truly make the biggest impact in their role. Common sense activities like meeting with educators on how to remove barriers to the students' learning and dealing with mental health or emotional crises that can ultimately arise. This is an important feature of the service. The clinician's participation in these ancillary activities is why the integrative service works. . . clinically.

The clinicians are paid fee-for-service. This means that they only receive compensation when they provide a billable service. The typical clinician makes \$47.50 per hour when they provide a billable service. The typical fee for service clinician is able to bill for 800 hours of service, which equates to \$38,000 per year. For a Masters-level professional.

This bill not only puts us on a path towards sustainability by reducing the deficits being absorbed by the community agencies, it allows providers like us to recruit and retain highly qualified clinicians, pay clinicians a livable salaried wage, help school districts provide mental health services, and ultimately avoid program closure. It's a win for students, families, schools and our whole state.

Thank you for your time and happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

John McAnuff, CPA, CGMA
Chief Financial Officer