



Senator Claxton, Rep. Meyer and members of the HHS Committee,

My name is Betsy Sweet and I am here on behalf of the BHCC speaking in favor of LD 1173. You have already heard from others that this bill is a second try at bringing the now 78 children who are in placements out of state home. The Department was required to develop a plan in 2019 and so far we have not seen it. Nor, when you look at the excellent materials and planning the Office of Child and Family Services have done in the past two years, do you see it mentioned in the materials as a goal or a plan.

Having these children placed out of state is a burden on the children and their families. It removes a child from any possible community supports and, particularly in this time of COVID, it was almost impossible for families to go visit their children – with the isolation often exacerbating their condition.

It also does not make financial sense. The cost of sending a child out of state for placement can cost 2-3 times as much as keeping them here in Maine.

Nor does it or should it require the creation or building of new facilities or programs out of whole cloth. There is a move to create new PRTF's (Private Residential Treatment Facilities) when what is needed is adequate supporting current PNMI's. The current children's providers could work with the Department to meet the specific needs – whether that means more intensive staffing, some structural changes in buildings, or specialized training to address the gaps in levels of treatment – these are all things that could be done to meet the needs for the vast majority of these children. But these changes are not things the Department has been willing to invest in and then when very high acuity children are referred to an agency, they are turned away because agencies don't have the resources to develop and/or maintain the necessary services, and then the child is placed out of state.

Here's what we are asking: Have the Department sit down with the advocates, the providers and the information on these children. Ask the question – what would it take to fix this? Then determine what it would take to be able to safely place these children within a current program or residence where they would receive quality attention and treatment. Again, figure out what it would take to fix this problem, and then create an implementation plan to do it. This is what was asked and legislation required two years ago. There is no more time, no better time than now to do this. Do it for the kids. Do it for their families. Please. Pass LD 1173