

Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business Committees, attn: Kristen Bowker
C/o Legislative Information Office
Cross Building, Room
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: LD #: 632: An Act to Amend the Social Work Education Loan Repayment Program

Dear Members of the Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business,

My name is Sarah Dyer, and I am a senior Social Work student at the University of Maine in Orono. I have lived in Maine my whole life. I graduated from Hampden Academy in 2018, and have since been living in Orono. I will graduate with my Bachelor's in Social Work in May of 2023. Afterwards, I plan to stay at the University of Maine, and start working towards my Master's in Social Work (MSW). After obtaining my MSW, I plan on staying in Maine, and serving residents in rural and medically underserved communities. I have loved my time spent at the University of Maine, and have found my calling in the Social Work profession.

I see the need for more mental health providers in Maine every day. My field placement this year has been at Acadia Hospital, in Bangor, ME. The waitlists for services are too long for those who need them most. Children, who are in crisis, are waiting for weeks in emergency rooms for a bed in an inpatient psychiatric setting. The problem doesn't stop there, I have seen kids that stay at Acadia Hospital for months, waiting for a spot in a residential program. After obtaining my MSW, I will work in an integrated behavioral health setting with other medical providers, in hopes to close some of the gaps between services for Maine residents.

Unfortunately, it is hard for individuals to choose a job in the field of social work, as wages are low and student loan debt is high. I will have been in school for six years by the time I graduate with my MSW. I already have \$30,000 in debt, and I am worried about how I will pay it back after graduation. I will be faced with a high cost of living, a low salary, and large payments on student loans. I was raised by a single mother, and although she helped me as much as she could, I still have had to take out personal loans for school on top of my student loans. I know I am not alone in this problem as many of my classmates have vocalized similar concerns. I love social work, and I am passionate about giving back to my community, but I am also deeply concerned thinking about how I will pay back my debt with the salary I will make.

Please vote "Yes" on LD #632

Respectfully,

Sarah Dyer