



OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

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To: Senator Chip Curry, Representative Tiffany Roberts
The Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business
From: Dr. Janet Sortor, Vice President and Chief Academic Officer; JSortor@MCCS.me.edu
Re: Statement in support of LD 1797 *An Act to Expand Maine's Health Care Workforce by Expanding Opportunities and Providing Tax Credits*
Date: May 2, 2023

Please accept this testimony in support of the Nurse Education Loan Repayment portion of LD 1797 on behalf of the Maine Community College System. As you have undoubtedly heard, Maine has a nursing crisis. The Maine Community College System recognizes this crisis and is working to mitigate the shortage of skilled, high-quality nurses. However, we face a shortage of qualified instructors.

Thanks to a \$2.5 million appropriation during the 130th, all seven colleges now offer a nursing program, and our colleges are working diligently to expand those programs. However, the average age of our full-time, master's prepared nursing instructors is 60 years old. That means we face a high likelihood of many instructors retiring in the next five to 10 years. We must act now to attract, train, develop, and nurture the next generation of instructors. However, it can be difficult to recruit nurse educators. The discrepancy between potential earnings for a floor nurse vs. a nursing educator is significant and meaningful; loan forgiveness may provide the financial incentive for nurses to consider entering the teaching profession. This is why we continue to support the Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program.

Nursing educators are required by accrediting bodies to be credentialed at the master's level, MSN. The Maine State Board of Nursing will provide an exemption upon request by the MCC Nursing Chair that allows newly hired nurse educators the time, usually two years, to earn an MSN. However, it is often difficult to find BSN's willing to make that commitment due to the cost. This opportunity would remove a significant barrier to pursuit of an MSN and recruiting nurse educators. Moreover, while up to 50% of the clinical requirements in a nursing program can be met through simulation, the remaining 50% must be met through a traditional clinical placement which is supervised by a nurse educator. Nurse educators are the linchpin in our ability to educate the nurses Maine needs so desperately. We cannot educate the nurses of the future without them.

Though some employers support educational reimbursement, a robust loan forgiveness program would also allow nurses to take more classes each semester, thus completing their degrees faster and ultimately entering the teaching profession sooner. New nursing educators could focus on their teaching, rather than having to work on the side to pay off their student loans. This opportunity could go a long way towards filling Maine's immediate nursing demand.

In closing, LD 1797 would help MCCS as we strive to fill the ever-widening gap between the workforce demand for qualified nurses and what we are able to provide. It is our sincere hope that you vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 1797.