



**Written Testimony Submitted by William Norbert
Governmental Affairs and Communications Manager**

Neither For Nor Against L.D. 105

An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission Regarding Foreign-trained Physicians Living in Maine to Establish a Sponsorship Program for Internationally Trained Physicians

February 5, 2025

Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services:

My name is Bill Norbert. I am the Governmental Affairs and Communications Manager at the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME). I am submitting written testimony Neither For Nor Against L.D. 105, *An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission Regarding Foreign-trained Physicians Living in Maine to Establish a Sponsorship Program for Internationally Trained Physicians*.

Please forgive my absence today but I must be in the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee to testify on various lines of FAME's biennial budget. I will make every effort to attend the work session in person.

FAME is a quasi-independent state agency whose mission is to enrich business and educational outcomes through relevant, timely financial support to Maine's people. Our vision is a Maine where all people have access to improved economic outcomes through business growth and education attainment.

FAME has been tasked by the Legislature since 1990 with administering the state's higher education finance programs. These include various grant, loan, and loan repayment programs. FAME cares deeply about our workforce needs and we recognize the challenges faced by many foreign-trained health care professionals who are skilled and wish to participate meaningfully in our economy. As you may recall, we currently administer the Foreign Credentialing Loan Foreign Credentialing and Skills Recognition Grant Program, which provides small grants to assist eligible immigrants living in Maine who are not yet eligible to work in the United States prepare for entry into the workforce. Grants for up to \$1,000 are available to help pay for the costs associated with the process

of becoming work-ready while waiting for issuance of a work permit by federal immigration authorities.

In March of last year, this Committee held a public hearing on a nearly identical bill, which was broadly supported in this committee but ultimately not enacted after being sent to the Appropriations Table. This bill, like the previous one, seeks to implement certain recommendations of the Commission Regarding Foreign-trained Physicians Living in Maine. The bill would do various things, but with respect to FAME, it would require us to establish and administer a sponsorship program to make grants to sponsoring institutions to provide alternative license pathways for internationally trained physicians in the state and to expand the number of physicians practicing in areas of the state experiencing a shortage of physicians.

The new program set forth in Section 1 of the bill would involve FAME making grants to the four teaching hospitals in the state. How much per individual accepted by the hospitals is unclear, as is the expected duration/commitment of the payment and participant. Currently the bill contemplates funding for up to ten total positions at any one time at sponsoring institutions responsible for training and employing eligible international medical graduates. Under the bill, sponsoring institutions would be the four teaching programs in the state accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education: Central Maine Medical Center (CMMC); Eastern Maine Medical Center (EMMC); MaineGeneral – Maine Dartmouth Family Medicine Residency; and Maine Medical Center (MMC).

Under the bill, FAME would enter into written agreements with each sponsoring institution that seeks to participate in the program. Under Section 2 of the bill, an internationally trained physician would apply directly to each sponsoring institution for placement through the program and the sponsoring institutions would screen each applicant by using an existing process utilized by a rural graduate medical education collaborative in the state. How much funding would be required or appropriate needs to be determined. \$2.5 million is recommended in the Commission’s Report (p. 12) as the likely total cost for ten slots (assuming \$250,000 per year per individual). Funding for these residency slots presumably would go directly to the hospital as the sponsoring institution. We also wonder what a sponsorship entails and how long it would last.

This bill appears to be good and reasonable proposal in response to the Commission testimony and workforce challenges facing the state. It would take some time to plan, set-up, and engage in rulemaking required to establish the program. Furthermore, and most importantly, we will need new funding to support the program.

Should the Legislature and Governor agree to enact this concept, we can develop and administer the program so long as sufficient funding is provided and our reasonable administrative costs are met. The bill as drafted says FAME shall use “available funding,” but I am not sure that is what is intended. We wish to make clear that we do not have any extra funds on hand to fund this program.

Thank you for your consideration of the bill. I will plan on attending the work session.