

Testimony of Maine Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Network, the
University of New England
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial
Affairs and the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic
Development
February 5, 2025

**LD 210, An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from
the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State
Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary
to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years
Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027**

Greetings distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development. My name is Adina Bercowicz. I am a resident of Yarmouth and am the state advocacy leader for the National Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Organization. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of continued funding for Maine AHEC. I am offering testimony as an advocate, as a public health professional that previously served as a Maine AHEC project assistant, and also as a chronic illness patient.

The healthcare workforce shortage in Maine is acute and continuing to deteriorate. The demographics in Maine are contributing to this challenge with an aging population that requires increased medical care, but also with a wave of retirements among existing healthcare professionals. Burnout among healthcare professionals has also been a nationwide issue, and further reduces workforce capacity in our state. In addition to the shortages in basic medical care, Maine has significant gaps among medical specialists. This results in long wait times to see specialists, extended travel burdens for patients who cannot find local care, and potentially out-of-state travel in the most medically challenging cases. Despite living in Cumberland county, which is the least underserved in Maine, I waited approximately a year to see a rheumatologist that was nearly an hour away

from my home. And even at that practice, the first physician that I saw was in the midst of retiring and there were additional delays as they struggled to hire replacements. I also have to travel to Boston to see a specialist neurologist for a condition that is beyond the professional scope of any of the neurologists practicing in Maine. These impediments to care are a huge burden for patients and exacerbate inequities in access to medical services. Inequitable medical care ultimately leads to worse healthcare outcomes throughout the state. The state funding that the Maine AHEC Network receives provides programs to alleviate these issues, and is a vital resource for a critical workforce shortage we are facing in our state.

I ask you to renew Maine AHEC's annual funding in order to improve equal access to healthcare and sustain the wellbeing of all Mainers throughout the state.

Adina Bercowicz, MPH
Maine State Advocate Leader, National AHEC Organization