

## **Testimony from the University of New England to the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs**

**LD 377: An Act to Establish a University of Maine Medical School and to  
Dedicate Funds from Raising the Cigarette Tax to the School**

**March 3, 2025**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. The University of New England (UNE) submitted testimony to this committee during the 131<sup>st</sup> Legislature in response to a similar proposal put forth by Senator Baldacci (LD 129, 131<sup>st</sup> Legislature). Ultimately that bill became a feasibility study to determine whether the State could support such a venture. Those findings will be released this summer. As this issue is coming again before the completion of the feasibility study, we thought it would be helpful to share our insights again.

For many who live in Maine's rural communities, finding a physician can be extremely difficult. This adversely affects the health of the individual and of the community. We applaud the Senator's work to address the physician shortage in Maine but we disagree with this solution. Creating a tax-funded medical school will not increase the number of physicians in Maine. The simple reason is that Maine does not have a medical student shortage; it has a clinical rotation and residency slot shortage.

UNE's Portland-based medical school and Tufts University's Maine Track medical program both offer Maine-based physician programs to students both from Maine and from away. Both programs require two years of predominately classroom learning followed by two years of clinical rotations in the field. Those who successfully complete their degree programs then move on to a residency program, and eventually become licensed physicians who practice within a community.

UNE medical students spend their entire third year within the same community hospital, becoming integrated into that community. This past year, UNE had 178 third-year students who needed clinical training. Of those students, only 70 could have their clinical rotations in Maine; the other 108 had to leave the state to find their clinical rotation site.

This is a concern and an opportunity. UNE data show that 57% of UNE medical students return to work in the community where they had their third-year clinical rotations or where they completed their residency. These students build strong bonds to these communities. Therefore, a far more effective approach to attracting and retaining physicians to Maine would be to provide more clinical rotations and residency slots in the state, particularly in underserved rural communities. Providing just 40 more clinical and residency slots would be expected to lead to

22 more physicians practicing in Maine. Adding more medical students, without increasing in-state clinical rotations and residency slots, will only lead to more students leaving the state to complete their training, and ultimately to practice.

UNE has excellent working relationships with rural Maine's health care systems. Annually, UNE sends 38 third-year medical students to over eight sites in Northern Light Health. Many UNE students seek out these opportunities and are eager to work in underserved communities. If there were more clinical training opportunities, UNE would have no problem filling them with students, increasing the likelihood that these doctors would end up taking a job in that community.

Financial resources are needed to allow more clinical rotations and residency slots to be established in the communities with the greatest need. Most of the investment pays for the time of the clinical professionals who oversee these field-based opportunities. For a fraction of the price of a new medical school, Maine could invest in creating more clinical rotations and residency slots, a proven and effective means of recruiting and retaining physicians. Fortunately, the State already has a program structured for this purpose: the MERGE Collaborative ( <https://mergecollaborative.org/>). The MERGE Collaborative needs additional state investment to continue its successful work. A bill has been submitted for this session to do that.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,  
Ed Cervone  
Director of External Relations

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University of New England  
LD 377

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