



**Testimony of Sarah Calder, MaineHealth**  
**In Support of LD 703, “An Act to Establish a Health Care Gap Year Program**  
**for Recent College Graduates”**  
**March 12, 2025**

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor, I am Sarah Calder, Senior Government Affairs Director at MaineHealth, and I am here to testify in support of LD 703, “An Act to Establish a Health Care Gap Year Program for Recent College Graduates.”

MaineHealth is an integrated non-profit health care system that provides a continuum of health care services to communities throughout Maine and New Hampshire. Every day, our over 24,000 care team members support our vision of “Working Together so Our Communities are the Healthiest in America” by providing a range of services from primary and specialty physician services to a continuum of behavioral health care services, community and tertiary hospital care, home health care and a lab.

Like health care systems across the country, MaineHealth is facing significant workforce shortages despite making historic investments to recruit and retain our current care team members. In fact, MaineHealth has increased wages for nonexecutives and non-physicians by \$324 million since 2021. These investments coupled with other retention initiatives have reduced our turnover rate from 18% in April 2022 to 13.8% in August 2024, substantially better than our comparison benchmark range of 14-21%. Despite this, we are still challenged with almost 2,500 open positions.

To meet the health care needs of our rapidly aging population, we must look to creative and innovative solutions to grow the health care workforce, which is why we support the legislation before you today. LD 518 continues funding for the Roux Gap Year (RGY) Program, a program currently funded by a Maine Department of Labor grant, and formed as a result of a partnership between Northeastern’s Roux Institute, Bouvé College of Health Sciences, and Maine’s hospital systems and community health clinics.

MaineHealth is proud to participate in this program, which allows aspiring healthcare professionals to gain valuable experience in providing direct patient care or essential behind-the-scenes services. After 1 year with us at MaineHealth, they can stay on in their role (if they wish) or move on with their plans to attend medical school or other advanced healthcare degree programs. Over the past two years, we’ve experienced several benefits of the program, including that participants are filling a current vacancy within our organization and that its solidifying future pipelines.

As the Legislature seeks to increase access to health care, including behavioral health care, it is critical that investments be made in increasing the pipeline of future health care workers. It is for that reason that we urge you to support LD 703.

Thank you for your consideration and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.