



Maine Community College System

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

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TO: Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy
Members of the Joint Standing Committee Education and Cultural Affairs
FROM: Becky Smith, Director of Government and Community Relations
RE: Testimony in opposition to LD 1225, *An Act to Amend the Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program*
DATE: April 14, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Becky Smith, I am here today to offer testimony in opposition to the changes proposed in LD 1225 to Maine's Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program on behalf of the Maine Community College System.

I would like to first thank Rep. Roberts and the co-sponsors for what I believe is the good intent behind this initiative. However, we worry that the very limited funds in the program could be expended on fewer students if the eligible degrees were broadened to include associate and bachelor degrees.

We support the position of the Organization of Maine Nursing Leadership that the fund should first prioritize master's and doctoral debt and if the committee chooses to include associate or bachelor's degrees there should be a cap on undergraduate debt eligibility. We also believe only those nurse educators who are currently in an advanced degree program or have finished their advanced degree program should be eligible to have their undergraduate debt considered.

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 have been able to expand those programs—doubling our capacity. However, the average age of our full-time master's prepared nursing instructors is 60 years old—although that age is decreasing. That means we still face a high likelihood of many instructors retiring in the next five to ten years. We must stay the course to attract, train, develop, and nurture the next generation of instructors.

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.

This is why we continue to support the Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program.