

Testimony of Maine Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Network at the University of New England
Before the Committee on Health and Human Services
January 7, 2026

LD 1658, An Act to Preserve and Strengthen the Fund for a Healthy Maine

Senator Graham and distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Zoe Hull. I am a resident of Westbrook and am the director of the Maine Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Network at the University of New England. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of the transfer of a portion of tobacco excise tax revenue from the General Fund to the Fund for a Healthy Maine as an annual and ongoing solution to the structural deficit in the Fund.

The Fund for a Healthy Maine currently provides critical funding for Maine AHEC Network, referred to in the state budget as the Health Education Centers, to develop and deliver healthcare workforce development programs in Maine. With declining payments from the 1998 Master Settlement Agreement, this work is put at risk. However, the transfer of a portion of tobacco excise tax revenue to the Fund for a Healthy Maine can ensure that healthcare workforce development efforts in the state remain funded and robust.

Established in 1994, Maine AHEC Network is a statewide healthcare workforce development program. We have four Health Education Centers with service areas that cover the whole state, including the University of New England which serves Southern Maine and also administers funding for the other Health Education Centers (Western: Franklin Memorial Hospital; Eastern: Healthy Acadia; Northern: Eastern Maine Medical Center). Our mission is to prepare and support Maine's healthcare workforce by creating healthcare learning opportunities for youth, students, and professionals to foster healthier communities and expand access to care across Maine. We fulfill our mission by:

- Encouraging and supporting Maine youth to pursue careers in the health professions
- Delivering didactic and community-based education to health professions students to prepare them to provide care for rural and medically underserved communities in Maine
- Offering continuing education programs to practicing health professionals

Our programming is designed to address the healthcare workforce shortages in our state. All but one of Maine's counties are designated as having health professional shortage areas in at least one of the following domains: primary care, mental health, and dental health. The financial support provided by the Fund for a Healthy Maine makes it possible for Maine AHEC Network to deliver comprehensive healthcare workforce development programming to ensure the healthcare workforce is prepared to meet the needs of our communities.

The primary source of funding for Maine AHEC Network is the federal AHEC grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration. The AHEC grant requires a one to one match in funding. Because the annual match is quite large, we combine several sources of funds, and our funding from the Fund for a Healthy Maine is an important component of these matching funds. Without ongoing funding from this state fund, the federal funding coming into Maine that supports healthcare workforce development efforts could be jeopardized.

The use of a portion of tobacco excise tax revenue from the General Fund to the Fund for a Healthy Maine not only supports public health prevention work, it also supports healthcare workforce development efforts. We request that the Maine Legislature pass LD 1658 to ensure ongoing funding for essential healthcare workforce development that is needed to support the health of Maine people.



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