

Testimony in Support of LD 2088

“An Act to Increase Access to Primary Care Provided by Physician Associates”

Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services Committee

January 19, 2026

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee,

My name is Andrea Bouchard, and I am a Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist and a resident of Northern Maine. I currently practice as Chief CRNA at Northern Maine Medical Center. I am submitting testimony in strong support of LD 2088, “An Act to Increase Access to Primary Care Provided by Physician Associates.”

Throughout my career as an advanced practice nurse, I have had the opportunity to work closely with physician associates (PAs) across a wide range of clinical environments, including tertiary-level cardiothoracic critical care at Maine Medical Center and rural hospital practice at Northern Maine Medical Center. In both settings, PAs have demonstrated a consistently high level of clinical competence, sound medical judgment, and deep commitment to patient-centered care.

In the cardiothoracic critical care division at Maine Medical Center, I worked alongside physician associates managing some of the most complex and medically fragile patients in our state. These PAs functioned as integral members of highly specialized, multidisciplinary teams, caring for patients with advanced cardiac and pulmonary disease, managing critical illness, and responding decisively in high-acuity situations. Their medical training, specialty expertise, and ability to practice autonomously within their scope mirrored that of other advanced practitioners, including nurse practitioners.

Similarly, in rural Maine, where access to healthcare is often limited and providers must practice with a high degree of independence, I have worked with physician associates who serve as essential pillars of care delivery. At Northern Maine Medical Center, PAs routinely manage broad scopes of practice, adapt to limited resources, and ensure continuity of care for underserved populations. In these settings, their ability to practice independently is not only appropriate but necessary to meet the healthcare needs of our communities.

Based on my experience in both rural and tertiary care environments, I have the utmost confidence in the clinical judgment, training, and capabilities of physician associates to practice independently once appropriate experience thresholds are met. LD 2088 appropriately preserves physician collaboration requirements for PAs early in their careers while allowing experienced PAs to practice in a manner consistent with other advanced practitioners in Maine.

Importantly, this bill promotes parity with nurse practitioners, who have been permitted to practice independently in Maine since 1995 following a defined supervision period. As a CRNA who practices independently while maintaining collaborative relationships with physician

colleagues, I can attest that independent practice does not diminish teamwork, safety, or quality of care. Rather, it strengthens access, flexibility, and responsiveness particularly in rural healthcare systems.

Physician associates, like advanced practice nurses, are deeply committed to collaborative, team-based medicine. Granting them the ability to practice independently does not dismantle collaboration; it removes unnecessary administrative barriers that limit access to care. LD 2088 represents a thoughtful, evidence-based approach to addressing Maine's workforce shortages while maintaining patient safety and professional accountability.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to vote "ought to pass" on LD 2088.

Thank you for your time and thoughtful consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Andrea Bouchard, CRNA MSNA BSNRN
Chief Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist

CCI Anesthesia
Northern Maine Medical Center
Maine Medical Center