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*Testimony of Representative Laurie Osher introducing*  
**LD 904, An Act Supporting the Rural Health Care Workforce in Maine**  
*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services*

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and honorable members of the Health and Human Services Committee. I am Laurie Osher and I represent District 25, the majority of Orono. Thank you for the opportunity to introduce **LD 904, An Act Supporting the Rural Health Care Workforce in Maine**.

Our state faces immense challenges to maintaining an adequate health care workforce. We are overwhelmingly rural, and many of our youth who are interested in medical careers leave Maine for education in other states and settle there after their training. This is because training opportunities for those wishing to become primary care providers in Maine are limited.

Policymakers, including members of this committee, and health care industry leaders recognize that the current situation is untenable.

The kernel of the idea for this bill came from my constituent and former University of Maine colleague Dr. Robert Bayer. Bob contacted me to suggest that Maine invest in a program like the one at Columbia Medical School. The Columbia-Bassett program places residents who began medical school in New York City in rural parts of upstate New York. The text of LD 904 was developed in consultation with Bangor-area physicians, administrators of the hospitals in the Bangor area, and emeritus and present faculty at the University of Maine. I gathered these individuals together (by zoom) in 2021 to come up with a strategy to increase the medical professionals working in rural Maine. Rather than propose to duplicate a program from New York, we came up with a proposal that supports and expands the good work that is already happening to train more providers to live and work in rural Maine.

LD 904 would establish the Maine Rural Health Education Workforce Fund, \$500,000 in funding per fiscal year, to support education and workforce development efforts in Maine's rural communities. The Fund will support the following purposes:

- 1) Expanding rural primary care clinical rotations for 3rd-year medical students to support long-term professional practice in the rural part of the State;
- 2) Expanding rural primary care clinical rotations for 4th-year medical students to support long-term professional practice in the rural part of the State;
- 3) Expanding rural primary care clinical residency placements in the State; and
- 4) Supporting the long-term sustainability of rural clinical preceptorship programs to provide support for students in undergraduate and graduate nursing programs.

There are experts here today who can share in more detail how this funding will be used to train our future health care providers. They tell me that depending on the mix of undergraduate and graduate students and the length of the rotations, this level of funding will support up to two dozen future health care providers each year.

Expanding education and training opportunities is crucial, but there is another necessary aspect of solving our health care workforce shortages. We must provide programs in the geographical areas where we most need these health care professionals to live and work after graduation. It has been studied and documented that the majority of college graduates settle near where they went to school<sup>1</sup>, and more than half of family medicine doctors stay within 100 miles of where they did their residency.<sup>2</sup> LD 904 builds on this knowledge.

This is our opportunity to apply what we know and to make sure that we are training medical professionals to work in Maine's rural counties where they are most needed. This bill provides the funding for more placements in rural Maine with the likely outcome that those placed will stay to work in or near the communities where they were trained. This is a worthwhile investment.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have for me and know that others are here to share their expertise as well. Thank you for your consideration.

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<sup>1</sup> How Your School Affects Where You Live (2018).

<https://web.archive.org/web/20210201085052/https://economicmodeling.com/how-your-school-affects-where-you-live/>

<sup>2</sup> Migration After Family Medicine Residency: 56% of Graduates Practice Within 100 Miles of Training (2013). <https://www.aafp.org/pubs/afp/issues/2013/1115/p704.html>