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## **TESTIMONY**

### **In Support of**

### **LD 904 An Act Supporting the Rural Health Care Workforce in Maine**

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

April 6, 2023

### **Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program**

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services.

My name is Laura Harper. I am a Senior Associate at Moose Ridge Associates. I am here today to present testimony in support of this legislation on behalf of the Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program.

The Ombudsman Program is a nonprofit agency that provides statewide advocacy for older and disabled residents of nursing homes, assisted housing, assisted living and for recipients of home care services. Additionally, the program serves patients in hospitals who experience barriers in accessing the long-term services and supports they need when they are ready for discharge.

This legislation requires the establishment of the Maine Rural Health Care Education Workforce Fund to support rural primary care and health professional workforce development as a dedicated non-lapsing account within the department. Funds would be used to support expanding rural longitudinal primary care clinical rotations for third year medical students, expanding rural primary care for 4<sup>th</sup> year medical students, expanding rural primary care clinical residency, supporting the long-term sustainability of rural clinical preceptorship programs for students in undergraduate and graduate nursing programs.

This initiative is a very good idea and would provide an opportunity to encourage both physicians and nurses to seek employment in underserved rural areas. Older and disabled adults who need nursing services provided in their homes contact the Ombudsman Program often for assistance because nurses cannot be found to provide the care that is needed. This is particularly true in rural areas.

Nursing homes in rural areas are challenged to find Medical Directors. The nursing homes that have closed in rural areas in recent years were also challenged by the inability to find nursing staff.

This initiative may be very helpful in beginning to address the shortage of physicians and nurses in rural areas of the state.

Thank you for your consideration.