

March 19, 2024

LD 2268 – An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission Regarding Foreign-trained Physicians Living in Maine to Establish a Sponsorship Program for International Medical Graduates

Senator Bailey, Rep. Perry and Members of the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services my name is Sally Sutton. I am a Policy Specialist with the New Mainers Resource Center at Portland Adult Education. Previously I held the position of Program Coordinator for 10 years where I had an opportunity on a daily basis to work with foreign trained professionals who are seeking to re-start their lives and careers here in Maine, many of whom were foreign trained physicians. I was also a member of the Commission that produced the recommendations on which this legislation is based. I am very pleased to be speaking in support of LD 2268.



I have some comments that are specific to this bill, however, I see LD 2267 and LD 2268 as recommendations that go hand in hand and are really a package of steps that Maine can take to provide assistance to foreign trained physicians who are seeking to start their medical careers in Maine. Without the programmatic and financial support provided in LD 2267, only those foreign trained physicians with access to financial resources will be able to qualify for the International Medical Graduate Sponsorship Program established under LD 2268.

SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS

1. Under § 12103-B 4. Application – I am concerned with the language “*...the sponsoring institution shall screen each applicant by using an existing process of a rural graduate medical education collaborative in the State.*” My concern is that while the purpose of using this existing collaborative was to be able to take advantage of an existing system, we as a Commission wanted to make it clear that the criteria for selecting the IMGs for the Sponsorship Program would not be the same as criteria the collaborative members use for the applicants to their residency programs. For example we would expect that applicants to the Sponsorship Program would have been out of medical school and practicing medicine for a number of years. This would count against them if they were applying to a residency program but could be considered differently if they were an applicant to the Sponsorship Program. No where in the legislation is that distinction made, and the language in the bill, as drafted, could be interpreted to mean that there is no distinction.

2. Sec. 2.32 MRSA §3271, sub-§8 #8 A.(1) – I recommend that the last phrase “*...and who has lived in the State for at least 12 months.*” is more appropriate listed as a condition under B. as one of the requirements that the applicant has to submit proof to the board that they are an acceptable applicant for the program. The IMG will need to submit evidence to the board that they have lived in the state for at least 12 months, whereas if it is just listed as part of the definition, it is not clear where and when that determination made.

3. Sec. 2.32 MRSA §3271, sub-§8 #8 -D. and E – Don't use the term restricted license – As part of the Commission's deliberations we discussed using the term "limited" or "restricted" license and learned that the term "restricted" implies some wrong doing on the part of the physician and that some adverse disciplinary action had been taken against them. This is a label that will follow them for the rest of their professional career and could negatively impact their ability to get employment. It is my suggestion that we do not use the term "restricted license" and that we follow the recommendation from the Commission's report. Under recommendation #5 we suggested using the current BOLIM license category, *temporary educational certificate*, for medical graduates in residency programs, which are site specific.

"The commission unanimously recommends limiting the number of years of a temporary educational certificate, which is issued by BOLIM, to two years, with no more than two renewals for each two-year educational certificate. Educational certificates are used by medical graduates to apply to practice in a residency program and are site specific. The renewable temporary educational certificate (analogous to the "limited license" or "supervised license" period in the sponsorship model in Massachusetts) allows the pathway physician to practice in a participating sponsoring institution in order to gain familiarity with non-clinical skills and standards appropriate for a Maine medical practice environment and leads to issuance of a full, unrestricted license." (pg. 10 – 11)

Paragraphs D. and E. refer to what is an obligation to the State that the physician has for the investment that has been made in them through the IMG Sponsorship Program. The obligation is that they are required to work in an area in the state that has a physician shortage. In that location they practice under a full license.

This type of service obligation is similar to the National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment Program. One of the eligibility requirements for that program is that applicants have "a current, full, permanent, unencumbered, unrestricted health professional license, certificate, or registration in the discipline in which they are applying to serve."

4. Require a report back to this committee with an update on progress and status – This is a complicated new program for the state. It involves a lot of different stakeholders and no one entity is specifically in charge of overseeing it all. Across the country many states are also trying to address this issue, and with everyone looking for best practices and consistent approaches amongst states. It will be important for policy makers in Maine to know if what we have set up is working. What is happening at the national level and in neighboring states? Do we have an approach that will be efficient, cost effective and meet the needs of the foreign trained doctors looking to practice in Maine, and the people of Maine who could benefit from the important role these doctors can play in our health care system.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony in support of LD 2268.

Sally Sutton, Policy Specialist
New Mainers Resource Center
Portland Adult Education
suttos@portlandschools.org