

MaineHealth

Testimony of Sarah Calder, MaineHealth In Support of 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” March 19, 2024

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services, I am Sarah Calder, Senior Government Affairs Director at MaineHealth, and I am here to testify in support of 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.”

MaineHealth is an integrated non-profit health care system that provides the full continuum of health care services to the residents of eleven counties in Maine and one in New Hampshire. MaineHealth is also the state’s largest private employer with over 23,000 care team members, but, we are facing a workforce crisis that is significantly impacting access to care. We are currently recruiting for over 2,900 positions, in addition to over 140 physicians and 130 advanced practice providers. In an effort to address the crisis, we have invested heavily in retaining our current workforce, but also in creative and innovative solutions to “grow our own,” including developing entry level employees in front line positions from Environmental Services to training tomorrow’s physicians.

MaineHealth recognizes the contribution our immigrant care team members make every day and we are committed to helping them grow within their careers. Many of them have higher education degrees from other countries – including medical degrees – and as their English language skills improve we provide guidance into other internal and external career pathway and training opportunities. But the barriers (at the state and federal levels) to fully integrating into the health care workforce – at the same skill and level they were trained in – are significant. To that end, we applaud the work of the Foreign-trained Physician Commission and their comprehensive approach to addressing some of these barriers, and the thoughtful solutions they have endorsed in their report.

We strongly support the bill before you today, which would help to fund a robust system to train International Medical Graduates (IMGs) so that they have an alternative to the very competitive Match process and to leverage the existing system of competency-based education to ensure that IMG physicians practicing in the state of Maine have the same competency as US-trained physicians practicing in the state. According to the National Resident Matching Program, just 58.5% of IMGs realized a match compared to 93.5% of U.S. MD graduates who trained in the United States.

We would, however, ask that the Committee amend the legislation as follows:

4. Application. An internationally trained physician shall apply directly to each sponsoring institution a rural graduate medical education collaborative in the State for placement through the program and the sponsoring institution shall screen each applicant by using an existing a process developed by of a the rural graduate medical education collaborative in the State.

As you may know, there are four Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) Sponsoring Institutions (teaching hospitals) in Maine: Maine Medical Center, Central Maine Medical Center, MaineGeneral Health, and Eastern Maine Medical Center. Using funds from the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan, the State of Maine funded the four ACGME Sponsoring Institutions in Maine to create a first-of-its-kind collaboration in Maine to develop high-quality rural residency rotations at hospitals and community-based healthcare center across the state with a focus on giving medical residents experience caring for Maine's diverse socio-economic, racial and regional populations – the Maine Rural GME Education (MERGE) Collaborative. The MERGE Collaborative is well-equipped to develop a process to screen competency and place IMGs in Maine, and the proposed amendment would prevent each of the four sponsoring institutions in Maine from evaluating each applicant separately.

Additionally, I would note that the funding for the MERGE Collaborative is set to expire this year. LD 1797, sponsored by Senate President Troy Jackson, provides funding to continue the work of the MERGE Collaborative, as well as funding for other important initiatives like support of 15 new GME positions in rural areas.

With that said, we urge you to support both LD 1797 and LD 2268 to ensure new Mainers are able to integrate into the health care workforce using their education and experience from another country.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.