



**Testimony by William Norbert
Governmental Affairs and Communications Manager**

Neither For Nor Against L.D. 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

Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services:

My name is Bill Norbert. I am the Governmental Affairs and Communications Manager at the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME). I am here to testify Neither For Nor Against L.D. 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*.

FAME is a quasi-independent state agency that provides financial solutions that help Maine people achieve their business and higher education goals. We create business and educational opportunities through our willingness to invest at greater risk based on public benefit. FAME has been tasked by the Legislature since 1990 with administering the state's higher education finance programs. These include various grant, loan, and loan repayment programs. FAME cares deeply about our workforce needs and we recognize the challenges faced by many foreign-trained health care professionals who are skilled and wish to participate meaningfully in our economy. As you may recall, we currently administer the Foreign Credentialing Loan Foreign Credentialing and Skills Recognition Grant Program, which provides small grants to assist eligible immigrants living in Maine who are not yet eligible to work in the United States prepare for entry into the workforce. Grants for up to \$1,000 are available to help pay for the costs associated with the process of becoming work-ready while waiting for issuance of a work permit by federal immigration authorities.

This bill seeks to implement certain recommendations of the Commission Regarding Foreign-trained Physicians Living in Maine. The bill would do various things, but with respect to FAME it would require us to establish and administer a sponsorship program for International Medical Graduates (IMGs). This would involve grants to the

four teaching hospitals in the state. How much per individual accepted by the hospitals is unclear, as is the expected duration/commitment of the payment and participant. Currently the bill contemplates funding for up to ten total positions at any one time at sponsoring institutions responsible for training and employing eligible international medical graduates. Under the bill, sponsoring institutions would be the four teaching programs in the state accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education: Central Maine Medical Center (CMMC); Eastern Maine Medical Center (EMMC); MaineGeneral – Maine Dartmouth Family Medicine Residency; and Maine Medical Center (MMC).

Under the bill, FAME would enter into written agreements with each sponsoring institution that seeks to participate in the program. An internationally trained physician would apply directly to each sponsoring institution for placement through the program and the sponsoring institutions would screen each applicant by using an existing process utilized by a rural graduate medical education collaborative in the state. How much funding would be required or appropriate needs to be determined. \$2.5 million is recommended in the Commission’s Report (p. 12) as the likely total cost for ten slots (assuming \$250,000 per year per individual). Funding for these residency slots presumably would go directly to the hospital as the sponsoring institution.

This bill and the companion bill you heard previously, LD 2267, appear to be good and reasonable proposals in response to the Commission testimony and workforce challenges facing the state. It will take some time to plan, set-up, and engage in rulemaking required to establish the program. Furthermore, we will need new funding to support the pilot program.

Should the Legislature and Governor agree to enact this concept, we can develop and administer the program so long as sufficient funding is provided and our reasonable administrative costs are met. The bill as drafted says FAME shall use “available funding,” but we do not have any extra funds on hand for this program. We wonder what a sponsorship entails and how long it would last. We also would appreciate having the ability to employ routine technical rulemaking authority if necessary (unclear at this stage) so we may, if necessary, further iron out details for the program. We also would be happy to report back to the committee on the pilot’s progress once it is up and running to allow you to consider future funding and retention of the program.

Thank you for your consideration of the bill. I will be happy to answer any questions you have.