



Testimony of Maine Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Network, the University of New England  
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Joint Standing Committee on  
Housing and Economic Development  
February 5, 2025

**LD 210, An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Senator Curry, Representative Gere, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Joint Standing Committee on Housing and Economic Development. My name is Zoe Hull. I am a resident of Westbrook and am the director of the Maine Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Network at the University of New England. I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony today in support of continued funding for Maine AHEC Network, referred to in the budget as the Health Education Centers, which have historically received support from the Fund for a Healthy Maine.

Established in 1994, Maine AHEC Network is a **statewide healthcare workforce development program**. We have four Health Education Centers with service areas that cover the whole state, including the University of New England which serves Southern Maine and also administers funding for the other three Health Education Centers (Healthy Acadia, Franklin Memorial Hospital, and Northern Light Eastern Maine Medical Center). Our mission is to enhance health equity and reduce health disparities among rural and underserved populations in Maine through education and healthcare workforce development.

We accomplish this mission through a three-pronged approach: 1) **youth health career pathway programs** that support Maine youth from rural and underrepresented populations to explore and pursue healthcare careers; 2) **health profession student training** in which we provide didactic and community-based education to health profession students to encourage and prepare them to provide care for rural and medically underserved communities in Maine; and 3) **health professional retention** efforts that include offering continuing education to practicing health professionals in rural and underserved areas in the state and hosting sessions that are designed to prevent burnout.

**The healthcare workforce development we are doing across the state is critical in light of the significant challenges our state faces in addressing the healthcare needs of our communities.** Principal among those challenges is the healthcare workforce shortage. All but one of Maine's counties are designated as having health professional shortage areas in at least one of the following domains: primary care, mental health, and dental health. The funding we receive from the state makes it possible for Maine AHEC Network to deliver comprehensive healthcare workforce development programming aimed at addressing these precise issues.

The primary source of funding for Maine AHEC Network is the federal AHEC grant from the Health Resources and Services Administration. The AHEC grant requires a one to one match in funding. Because the annual match is quite large, we combine several sources of funds, and our state funding is an important component of these matching funds. Without ongoing funding from the state, the federal funding coming into Maine that supports healthcare workforce development efforts could be jeopardized.

One of the most critical aspects of the work that I want to end by highlighting is our youth health career pathway programming. With research demonstrating that health professionals who grew up in rural communities are more likely to choose to practice in rural areas, it is of utmost importance to prioritize and fund these youth programs that are designed to support youth from our rural Maine communities in pursuing healthcare careers. Last year we worked with over 2,000 high school students from rural and underserved communities in Maine to guide them along their journey to becoming health professionals, health professionals who can one day help alleviate the healthcare workforce shortages in our state.

Ongoing funding for the Health Education Centers is a promising and worthwhile investment in Maine's future. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of the ongoing annual funding of \$110,000 for Maine AHEC Network's Health Education Centers.

Zoe Hull, MPH  
Maine AHEC Network, University of New England