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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Representative Kristi Mathieson presenting

LD 105, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission Regarding Foreign-trained Physicians Living in Maine to Establish a Sponsorship Program for Internationally Trained Physicians

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage Insurance and Financial Services

Good morning, Senator Bailey and esteemed colleagues on the Health Coverage Insurance and Financial Services (HCIFS) Committee. I am Representative Kristi Mathieson representing House District 151, Kittery. Thank you for your time today. It is my honor to present to you **LD 105, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission Regarding Foreign-trained Physicians Living in Maine to Establish a Sponsorship Program for Internationally Trained Physicians.**

This bill originated in the 131st Legislature from a commission tasked with studying how to integrate internationally trained physicians into the health care workforce to best reflect their level of skills and training; with the ultimate goal to improve access to health care throughout Maine and increase the health care workforce. The Maine Hospital Association noted in March of 2024 that Maine ranks first in the nation for the number of physicians aged 60 or older.¹ Most counties in Maine face shortages of primary care, mental health, and/or dental health care and Maine hospitals are experiencing significant difficulties hiring doctors.² As of October 2023 Maine hospitals were actively recruiting 385 physicians and taking an average of 277 days to recruit one physician to practice in Maine.³

LD 105 will help alleviate these physician shortages and enhance the health care workforce while maintaining high standards of care. It would create a program within the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME) to grant accredited, sponsoring institutions the ability to provide a pathway to

¹ Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), 2021 State Physician Workforce Data Report, January 2022. https://store.aamc.org/downloadable/download/sample/sample_id/506

² Robert Graham Center, "Maine: Projecting Primary Care Physician Workforce." <https://www.grahamcenter.org/content/dam/jgg/documents/maps-data-tools/state-collections/workforce-projections/Maine.pdf>

³ Maine's Rural Health Research Center, "Maine: A Health Focused Landscape Analysis," April 28, 2022. Retrieved from: https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/ggyviewcontentcgi?article=1025&context=p0pulation_health

full licensure for internationally trained physicians living in Maine. The sponsorship program requires strict qualifying requirements and successful completion of all clinical skills and standards appropriate to practice medicine in our state. Once the board has been provided proof of successful completion of the sponsoring institution's program, the internationally trained physician is eligible to practice medicine at a participating health care facility, in a physician shortage area, for the minimum of the same years they were involved in the sponsorship program.

This bill received a unanimous ought to pass vote in HCIFS last session. It's a great pathway for internationally trained physicians (currently living in Maine) to reach their fullest potential while addressing the ongoing physician shortage across the state. I hope you will join me in supporting LD 105 and I appreciate your time today.

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[CHANGES FROM ORIGINAL BILL SHOWN IN BOLD ITALICS AND STRIKE THROUGH]

DRAFT PROPOSED COMMITTEE AMENDMENT:

LD 105, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission Regarding Foreign-trained Physicians Living in Maine to Establish a Sponsorship Program for Internationally Trained Physicians

Amend the bill as follows:

Sec. 1. 20-A MRS-A §12103-B is enacted to read:

§12103-B. International Medical Graduates Sponsorship Program

1. Definitions. As used in this section, unless the context otherwise indicates, the following terms have the following meanings.

A. "Internationally trained physician" has the same meaning as in Title 32, section 3271, subsection 8, paragraph A, subparagraph (1).

B. "Physician shortage area" has the same meaning as in Title 32, section 3271, subsection 8, paragraph A, subparagraph (4).

C. "Sponsoring institution" has the same meaning as in Title 32, section 3271, subsection 8, paragraph A, subparagraph (5).

2. Program established. The International Medical Graduates Sponsorship Program, referred to in this section as "the program," is established within the authority to make grants to sponsoring institutions to provide an *additional* alternative license pathway for internationally trained physicians in this State and to expand the number of physicians practicing in physician shortage areas. The authority shall administer the program in accordance with the requirements of this section.

3. Administration. Under the program, the authority shall use available funding to establish up to a total of 10 positions annually at one or more sponsoring institutions for the employment and training of internationally trained physicians issued a temporary educational license to practice medicine pursuant to Title 32, section 3271, subsection 8, paragraph B. The authority shall enter into an agreement with each sponsoring institution that seeks to participate in the program.

4. Application. An internationally trained physician shall apply directly to a rural graduate medical education collaborative in the State for screening and placement by using a process and qualifying criteria developed by a rural graduate medical education collaborative in the State.

5. Fund created. A nonlapsing, interest-earning, revolving fund under the jurisdiction of the authority, known as the International Medical Graduates Sponsorship Program Fund and referred to in this subsection as "the fund," is created to carry out the purposes of this section. Any unexpended balance in the fund carries over for continued use under this section. The authority may receive, invest and expend on behalf of the fund money from gifts, grants, bequests and donations or other sources in addition to money appropriated or allocated by the State. Money in the fund must be invested by the authority, as provided by law, with the earned income to be added to the fund. Money received by the authority on behalf of the fund must be used for reasonable administrative expenses and for the purposes of this section.

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6. Rules. The authority may adopt rules as necessary to implement this section. Rules adopted pursuant to this section are routine technical rules as defined in Title 5, chapter 375, subchapter 2-A.

Sec. 2. 32 MRSA §3271, sub-§8 is enacted to read:

8. Additional Alternative license pathway for internationally trained physicians.

Notwithstanding any other requirements of this chapter, the board shall provide an *additional alternative* license pathway for an internationally trained physician who has been licensed or otherwise authorized to practice medicine in a country other than the United States and who meets the requirements of this subsection to apply for and obtain a full and unrestricted license to practice medicine in this State.

A. For the purposes of this subsection, unless the context otherwise indicates, the following terms have the following meanings.

(1) "Internationally trained physician" means a physician who has received a degree of doctor of medicine or its equivalent from a legally chartered medical school outside the United States recognized by the World Health Organization or its successor organization *World Federation for Medical Education and the Foundation for the Advancement of International Medical Education and Research* or its successor organizations; who has been licensed or otherwise authorized to practice medicine in a country other than the United States; and who has practiced medicine for at least one year.

(2) "Medical licensing examination" means the United States Medical Licensing Examination or its successor examination.

(3) "Participating health care facility" means a health care facility approved by the board that provides a program for internationally trained physicians according to criteria developed or approved by the board and that provides medical care in a physician shortage area.

(4) "Physician shortage area" means a geographic region or population in the State experiencing a shortage of physicians relative to population and need, as determined by the board.

(5) "Sponsoring institution" means any of the 4 hospitals in this State accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education on January 1, 2024.

B. An internationally trained physician may apply for a temporary educational license to practice medicine for a renewable 2-year term if a sponsoring institution and the internationally trained physician submit evidence acceptable to the board that the internationally trained physician:

(1) Has lived in this State for at least 12 months;

(2) Has a valid certificate issued by the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates or its successor organization or other credential evaluation service approved by the board, except that the board may waive such certification at its discretion when the internationally trained physician is unable to obtain the required documentation;

(3) Has achieved a passing score on both Step 1 and on Step 2 CK of the medical licensing examination;

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(4) Has entered into an agreement with the sponsoring institution providing that a participating health care facility shall develop, assess and evaluate the internationally trained applicant's familiarity with nonclinical skills and standards appropriate for the practice of medicine in the State, according to assessment and evaluation criteria developed or approved by the board;

(5) Has agreed to enter a full-time employment relationship with the sponsoring institution after the board issues to the internationally trained physician a temporary educational license pursuant to this paragraph; and

(6) Has satisfied any other criteria that may be developed by the board that the board considers necessary.

C. A temporary educational license to practice medicine granted by the board under paragraph B may be renewed twice, for a total of 6 years.

D. An internationally trained physician who provides the board with proof of successful completion of the sponsoring institution's program under paragraph B and a passing score on Step 3 of the medical licensing examination is eligible to apply for a renewable 2-year license to practice medicine only at a participating health care facility in a physician shortage area designated by the board, and that license authorizes the physician to practice medicine independently in a primary care setting or a specialty approved by the board.

E. After practicing medicine pursuant to a license issued by the board under paragraph D for a minimum of *the same number of years the internationally trained physician practiced pursuant to paragraph B* 6 years, an internationally trained physician may apply for and the board may issue a full and unrestricted license to practice medicine in accordance with this subsection.

F. The board may adopt rules as necessary to implement the requirements of this subsection. Rules adopted pursuant to this subsection are routine technical rules as defined in Title 5, chapter 375, subchapter 2-A.

G-F. Beginning January 1, 2027 and biennially thereafter, the board shall report to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over matters related to the licensing of physicians on the status of the International Medical Graduates Sponsorship Program established in Title 20-A, section 12103-B and the alternative license pathway established in this subsection. The board shall report on the number of internationally trained physicians participating in the program and the progress of those physicians toward obtaining full and unrestricted licenses to practice medicine in this State. The joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over matters related to the licensing of physicians may report out legislation based on the report submitted in accordance with this paragraph to the session of the Legislature in which the report is submitted.

SUMMARY

This bill establishes a sponsorship program within the Finance Authority of Maine to make grants to sponsoring institutions to provide an alternative *additional* license pathway for internationally trained physicians in the State and to expand the number of physicians practicing in areas in the State

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experiencing a shortage of physicians. Under the program, internationally trained physicians are provided a pathway to full and unrestricted licensure as physicians in the State as long as certain requirements are met.

The draft amendment makes the following changes to the bill:

- 1. Changes the terminology from "alternative license pathway" to "additional license pathway" to reflect current terminology used at the national level;*
- 2. Updates the names of the organizations currently responsible for maintaining the directory of world medical schools;*
- 3. Clarifies the sponsor's intent relating to the time period required for an internationally trained physician to practice under the conditions specified in the bill before applying for a full and unrestricted license;*
- 4. Adds language authorizing the Board of Licensure in Medicine to adopt rules.*

DRAFT