



MAINE'S LEADING  
VOICE FOR HEALTHCARE

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## TESTIMONY OF THE MAINE HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION

### In Support Of

**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*

**February 5, 2025**

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee, my name is Sally Weiss, and I am here on behalf of the Maine Hospital Association. MHA represents Maine's 34 private acute care, psychiatric, and rehabilitation hospitals.

I am here today to express our support for LD 105, an act to establish a sponsorship program for foreign trained physicians. Maine has an aging workforce, which includes physicians. In 2022, Maine ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in nation for number of physicians aged 60 or older, with 39.3% (1,746), while at the same time ranking 50<sup>th</sup> in the nation for the proportion of physicians aged 39 or younger, with only 525 physicians, or 11.8%.<sup>1</sup> Maine hospitals are experiencing significant difficulties hiring physicians from all specialties—from primary care to specialty and subspecialty.

In October of 2023, MHA surveyed hospitals to assess the current openings for physicians across the state and how these vacancies were impacting access to care. At that time, Maine hospitals reported that they were actively recruiting 385 full time physicians with it taking on average, 277 days to recruit one physician to practice in Maine.

What do these vacancies mean for patients and Maine communities? Let me share a few direct quotes from Maine hospitals:

- “We have 300+ referrals in a backlog for OB-Gyn care. It's a 1 year wait for first appointment.”

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

- “Our Ears, Nose & Throat (ENT) practice is currently seeking 4 FTEs with only 1.6 FTE remaining. We are currently scheduling new “operative” referrals 9 months out, with a backlog of 167 referrals.”
- “We see more people delaying needed care due to access or seeking care in the emergency department.”

Individuals who completed their medical training and practiced medicine outside of the United States but are currently living in Maine because of forced immigration or asylum cannot convert their foreign physician training and experience into practice here in Maine, despite their wanting and capacity to do so. The challenges are numerous, such as difficulty translating various educational and training experiences into U.S. healthcare occupations, licensing exams and certification requirements that don’t mirror their own, lack of clinical experience and exposure to the U.S. health system, and cultural and communication barriers, to name a few.

LD 105 creates a new program that would allow foreign trained physicians living in Maine to become a licensed physician with the ability to practice in Maine. The program, as outlined, would be administered by the Maine Rural Graduate Medical Education Collaborative (MERGE Collaborative)<sup>2</sup> and ensure that each foreign trained physician trainee meets all necessary requirements and competencies prior to licensure, while providing an environment where the individual could be supported to gain additional skills related to practicing medicine in the U.S. healthcare system. All candidates who are admitted into the program and successfully complete it, would then be able to practice medicine in Maine with the same privileges as a U.S. trained physician.

I wanted to highlight that the MERGE Collaborative was established by DHHS using ARPA funding and has since grown rural graduate medical education across the state. This funding is set to expire this year; however, legislation sponsored by Senator Henry Ingwersen provides funding to continue the work of the MERGE Collaborative.

As a member of the Commission who studied this issue and helped to frame the recommendations, I believe that this legislation is the right approach to supporting foreign trained physicians currently living in Maine to reach their fullest potential while also addressing the ongoing physician shortage across the state.

Thank you and I’m happy to answer any questions and make myself available during the work session, should that be helpful.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://mergecollaborative.org/>