



Testimony of Sarah Calder, MaineHealth
Neither For Nor Against LD 377, "An Act to Establish a University of
Maine Medical School and to Dedicate Funds from Raising the Cigarette
Tax to the School"
Monday, March 3, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I am Sarah Calder, Senior Government Affairs Director at MaineHealth, and I am here today to testify Neither For Nor Against LD 377, "An Act to Establish a University of Maine Medical School and to Dedicate Funds from Raising the Cigarette Tax to the School."

In 2023, the 131st Legislature approved LD 129, "Resolve, To Direct the University of Maine System to Study the Feasibility of Establishing a Public Allopathic Medical School in Penobscot County," which authorized the University of Maine System to conduct a feasibility study. The feasibility study has not yet been released, and, therefore, we believe LD 377 is premature. Developing a new medical school is not a small undertaking a several factors must be considered. The cost to develop and build a medical school ranges between \$75 and \$150 million annually, and medical school requires significant capacity of the surrounding hospitals to provide necessary clinical rotations, including preceptors.

I also wanted to take the opportunity today to share with the Committee that, while Maine does not have a state-sponsored medical school, we do have two Maine-based medical school programs, including Maine Medical Center's Maine Track program, that are dedicated to addressing the shortage of physicians, particularly in rural Maine.

Maine Medical Center (MMC) partnered with the Tufts University School of Medicine (TUSM) in 2008 to start an allopathic medical school program designed to address the shortage of physicians in Maine, particularly in our rural areas, and to give Maine student's access to high-quality medical education at a tuition cost similar to that of a state-sponsored program. The unique Maine Track program offers a rigorous training program that exposes students to rural clinical practice from day one and provides students firsthand experience providing care in local communities throughout the state including such towns as Madison, Caribou, Belfast, Wiscasset, Richmond, and Norway.

Maine Medical Center also guarantees that at least 20 Maine students in each class receive scholarships of \$25,000 per year, totaling more than \$2 million each year. The scholarships have been raised through the generosity of private donors, local companies, and, very importantly, the Doctors for Maine's Future scholarship program, which was created by the 124th Maine Legislature and administered by the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME). The Doctors for Maine's Future scholarship program is a public-private partnership between the State and Tufts – Maine Track and the University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine, as each school is required to match the scholarships, 1:1.

The Doctors for Maine's Future scholarships were originally intended to bring the cost down to that of an in-state medical school, but, unfortunately, the scholarships have not kept pace with the rising cost of medical school. And, as my colleague, Dr. Dena Whitesell, shared with you during your Biennial Budget hearings, the proposed funding for the Doctors for Maine's Future scholarship program in the Biennial Budget will reduce the number of scholarships from 5 students at each institution to 3 students at each institution, and then eventually 2 at each institution. It is important to note that the reduction in scholarships also reduces the number of scholarships required to be matched by both schools. This could result in fewer scholarships for Maine-based students. We continue to urge this Committee to add an additional \$600,000 over the biennium to restore the funding to current levels.

The data is clear that the Maine Track program is critically important in producing local physicians:

- 74% of Maine Track students who completed their residency in Maine are practicing in Maine. This is exceptionally high in comparison to data from the Association of American Medical Colleges', which found that a 58.6% of the individuals who completed residency training from 2014 to 2023 are practicing in the state where they did their residency training.
- The Maine Track Class of 2025 includes 42 students—20 of these students grew up in Maine.
- To date, 429 physicians over 11 classes have graduated from the Maine Track Program. 278 were from Maine.
- The program is accessible. We are very proud to offer a Maine Track Early Assurance Program for sophomores at Bates College, Bowdoin College, Colby

College, and all University of Maine campuses. Additionally, The MMC-TUSM acceptance rate last year for Mainers into the Maine Track was 47%. For those from other states, our acceptance rate was only 17%. This compares very favorably to TUSM's overall acceptance rate of approximately 4% and the average national acceptance rate of approximately 5.5%.

While we believe that the creation of a public medical school is a worthy conversation to have, we also believe that the State can make meaningful investments that will help to address the shortage of physicians without creating a new medical school. Restoring funding for the Doctors for Maine's Future scholarship program – and even considering raising the amount of the scholarship – is one such investment. Another is that states' residency slots have been limited by funding to support Graduate Medical Education from the Federal government. MaineHealth has been able to increase the number of resident and fellowship positions through our own resources, recognizing this as a solution to our physician workforce needs. Maine Medical Center currently trains 333 residents and fellows, and 14 non-ACGME accredited trainees and is approved for a total of 407 GME trainees when all approved program expansions are finalized in 2031. But more needs to be done to ensure that Maine-trained students have access to residency placements in Maine. Recent reports show that Maine is the 8th best state at retaining physicians who complete their residency in Maine. We can further enhance the effectiveness of the Doctors for Maine's Future scholarship program if we can increase the number of residency slots in Maine.

The outcomes of the Maine Track and UNE College of Osteopathic Medicine programs – practicing in primary care, practicing in a rural community, and practicing in an underserved area – are critical as we look to grow and maintain access to care for your constituents throughout Maine.

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