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Thank you for according me the privilege of discussing our experience with gap students at the Knox Clinic in Rockland, Maine. As you may know, the Knox Clinic is a community clinic providing medical, dental, and behavioral health services to the residents of the Midcoast, regardless of their ability to pay. In the past 25 years, the Clinic has provided a vital service. For example, in our dental practice, we are the only ones who reliably will care for people who have no payment capability or who have Maine Care.

Over the past three years, we have been closely aligned with those who wish to develop a more robust workforce in Maine. We have partnered with a number of local and regional organizations in research proposals and student activity. This affiliation led to participation in the Gap Year project under discussion today. You may be aware of the difficulty in attracting skilled dental practitioners to rural practices. Through the Gap Year program, we have been able to have two young people interested in dentistry join our practice. We have trained them to work as dental assistants under the tutelage of our full-time dentist. One has "graduated" from our program and is now enrolled in dental school with the full anticipation of returning to the type of practice she experienced with us. A second student, now working at the Clinic, is similarly inclined.

Members of the Committee, the investment in this program is small and its returns are huge. Keeping and attracting bright young people to careers in Maine is the goal of the program. That goal is being realized far beyond expectations and it deserves your continued support. To this end, we strongly support LD 703 and we urge you to bring this opportunity legislation to fruition.

Once again, thank you for allowing me to express my appreciation for past support and encouragement for it to continue.

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