

Senator Raferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education, my name is Owen Doane, I am originally from South Portland, and I am a third-year medical student in the Maine Track Program at Tufts University School of Medicine. I am writing in strong support of LD 581, "An Act to Fund the Doctors for Maine's Future Scholarship Program."

Attending medical school had long been a dream of mine, but the considerable financial burden required careful planning and adaptability. While I was attending college at the University of Michigan, my parents divorced after 25 years of marriage, disrupting the financial stability I had previously been privileged to rely on. The cost of medical school suddenly became one of the primary factors determining where I could realistically apply and ultimately enroll.

I was originally drawn to the Maine Track program for its emphasis on community-based medicine and its commitment to training physicians to care for underserved populations - the proximity to home seemed like an added bonus as well. The more I learned, the more I saw the value of this program - not just for my education, but for the impact it has on healthcare here in Maine. However, despite my enthusiasm, the cost remained a major concern. I knew that without significant financial support, attending medical school would be a challenge. When I received the news that I had been selected as a scholarship recipient, it was not just a moment of relief - it was the deciding factor that allowed me to commit fully to this program and the mission it upholds.

Now as a third-year medical student, I have witnessed firsthand just how impactful these scholarships have been for me and my fellow classmates. Many of us are hoping to stay in Maine for our residency programs and eventually practice throughout the state. The financial support we have received for the past three years is allowing us to explore careers in primary care, general surgery, and other high-need specialties without the pressure of seeking higher paying opportunities to manage loan repayment. In fact, 74% of Maine Track graduates who completed their residencies in Maine continue to practice here, compared to the national average of 58.6% of individuals practicing in the state of their residency training.

It is a well-known and unfortunately frequent headline that Maine is currently experiencing an extreme shortage of physicians. Supporting these scholarships is one of the most direct ways we can invest in Maine's communities to address this issue. To cut back on this funding in accordance with the proposed budget feels counterproductive and frankly irresponsible. I plead that you support LD 581 to ensure that financial barriers do not stand in the way of dedicated students who are ready to serve their communities and address the growing medical needs of our state.

Thank you, and I welcome any further questions or concerns you may have,
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