



**Testimony by William Norbert
Governmental Affairs and Communications Manager**

in Support of L.D. 581

An Act to Fund the Doctors for Maine's Future Scholarship Program

March 31, 2025

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Bill Norbert. I am the Governmental Affairs and Communications Manager at the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME). I am here to testify in support of L.D. 581, *An Act to Fund the Doctors for Maine's Future Scholarship Program*.

FAME would like to thank Senator Bennett for sponsoring this bill to provide meaningful, ongoing funding for a program we have had the pleasure of administering since its inception back in 2009-2010. We also wish to thank the various bipartisan co-sponsors of the bill.

This bill would provide ongoing funding of \$300,000 per year to help maintain the Doctors for Maine's Future Scholarship Program. The Doctors for Maine's Future Scholarship Program provides a \$25,000 scholarship annually for up to four years to Maine residents attending medical school at either University of New England College of Medicine or at Tufts University School of Medicine-Maine Medical Center Program (Maine Track Program). Schools must provide an equal number (match) of \$25,000 scholarships to Maine resident students attending the school.

The Doctors for Maine's Future Scholarship Program was created by the 124th Maine Legislature. At the time it was founded, the program scholarships were designed to provide a tuition subsidy of fifty percent of the cost of attendance annually, for eligible students who enter qualifying Maine-based medical school programs. This amount no longer represents fifty percent of the cost of attendance, however. The goal of the program is to increase the number of Maine physicians and to increase the number of physicians who practice in primary care, underserved specialties, or underserved areas of Maine. Another goal is to increase aspirations for Maine residents, especially those with some financial need, to attend medical school in-state.

Each year FAME uses \$400,000 from its overall Student Financial Assistance line of General Fund appropriations to the program. This helps to fund four students: two awards per medical school annually, which are in turn matched by the medical schools. Over the years, the Legislature has periodically appropriated funding for the program to help us make more than two awards per school annually. We've made three to five awards per school traditionally depending on available funding but have had to recently reduce awards to three per school due to declining funding. This bill would help us to increase awards back to at least four per school annually.

To give you an idea of the cost/math involved: each scholarship is for \$25,000 for four years of education (\$100,000 per student). An additional \$400,000 per year in ongoing annual funding thus would help to fund four more students annually: two more students at each institution (which would again provide for four awards per school annually if we count FAME's portion), and then each institution would need to match each scholarship. After awards are made this year, there will be approximately \$684,000 remaining in program funds (not counting FAME's annual \$400,000 contribution).

As you will hear from various stakeholders, the participating medical schools and the bright, impressive students who have benefitted from it, this program has meant a great deal to Maine's medical community, Maine people (particularly those needing health care in rural, underserved areas,) and our promising youth who wish to live and work in our beautiful state to care for our people.

Finally, we fully recognize and are sensitive to the challenging budgetary situation facing the Administration and this Legislature, but the conversation regarding the positive impact of this program, to both participating students and the communities they serve, as well as the ongoing sustainability of the program, is an important one to have.

Thank you for your consideration of the bill. I will be happy to answer any questions you have.