



**Testimony of Sarah Calder, MaineHealth
In Support of LD 651, “An Act to Fund the Maine Health Care Provider Loan
Repayment Program”
March 31, 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 to testify in support of LD 651, “An Act to Fund the Maine Health Care Provider Loan Repayment Program.”

MaineHealth is an integrated non-profit hospital system that provides the full continuum of health care services to the residents of eleven counties in Maine and one in New Hampshire. MaineHealth is also the state’s largest private employer with over 24,000 care team members, but, we are facing a workforce crisis that is significantly impacting access to care. We are currently recruiting for nearly 2,500 positions, including 117 physicians and over 540 nurses.

In the face of these challenges, MaineHealth is working hard to recruit new care team members and retain the ones that we have, through investment in compensation, workforce development, care team engagement, and attention to work-life balance. Those investments, including \$324 million in wages for non-executives and non-physicians since 2021, are paying off. In fact, MaineHealth’s care team member turnover rate has improved in the past two and a half years from 18% in 2022 to 13.8% in 2024, which is substantially better than our comparison benchmark range of 14-21%.

Despite this improvement, national estimates suggest that 3 out of 4 entrants into the job market over the next 10 years will need to enter the health care field to meet the needs of our rapidly aging population. As the oldest state in the nation, we must look to creative policy solutions to meet the increased workforce demands and ensure timely access to health care services. LD 651 adds much needed funding to the highly successful Health Care Provider Loan Repayment Program, which is one tool Maine can use to recruit and retain health care workers by helping to relieve the financial burden of an advanced degree.

The health care system in Maine is becoming exceedingly fragile, which is evidenced by the recent hospital and service closures, as well as the hundreds of patients stuck in our hospitals every day waiting for the next appropriate level of care. The workforce crisis is contributing to the unraveling of our system of care, and we urge the Legislature to support several critical workforce related bills this Session, including LD 651, to help address our state’s growing workforce needs.

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