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Written testimony of Representative Holly Eaton

LD 625: An Act Supporting Education for the Rural Health Care Workforce

Before the Health and Human Services Committee

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and members of the committee,

My name is Representative Holly Eaton, and I represent House District 15, which includes the communities of Deer Isle, Stonington, Brooklin, Tremont, Southwest Harbor, Frenchboro, Swan's Island, Isle au Haut, and Vinalhaven.

I am writing in strong support of LD 625: *An Act Supporting Education for the Rural Health Care Workforce*.

Across the rural and island communities I serve, we are experiencing a growing health care workforce crisis. Our local medical center currently has two open positions—one in nursing and one clerical—that they have been unable to fill. It has become nearly impossible to attract new providers. Our dental office is in the same situation—unable to get help or recruit a new provider. As fewer people go into health care professions, especially in rural areas, this problem will only get worse.

One nurse who has worked at our Island Medical Center shared:

“Staffing had been an issue before COVID, but COVID put the nail in the coffin. Low pay is one of the biggest issues. They bring in agency staff and pay them more just to meet the minimum staffing levels, which burns out regular staff. Then the regular staff quit, and the cycle continues. If we had enough educated staff being paid a reasonable wage, things would be better.”

This isn't isolated to one facility. Several islands in my district are not large enough to support a medical center at all, or can't offer wages high enough to attract qualified providers. One island

District 15: Brooklin, Deer Isle, Eagle Island Township, Frenchboro, Southwest Harbor, Stonington, Swan's Island, Tremont, Isle au Haut, Vinalhaven

hospital is currently cutting services due to staffing and financial strain. These communities are at real risk of being left without access to consistent care.

LD 625 helps address this by investing in rural health care education. When students are trained closer to home, they are more likely to stay and serve their communities. This bill helps create that path—and rural Maine desperately needs it.

Supporting LD 625 is an investment in the future of rural health care, and in the wellbeing of communities like mine. I respectfully urge the committee to vote in favor.

Thank you for your time and consideration.