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**LD 625 An Act Supporting Education for the Rural Health Care Workforce  
Testimony in Support**

**April 3, 2025**

Northern Light Health  
Acadia Hospital  
A.R. Gould Hospital  
Blue Hill Hospital  
C.A. Dean Hospital  
Eastern Maine Medical Center  
Home Care & Hospice  
Inland Hospital  
Maine Coast Hospital  
Mayo Hospital  
Mercy Hospital  
Northern Light Health Foundation  
Northern Light Pharmacy  
Sebasticook Valley Hospital

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Lisa Harvey-McPherson RN. I am here today on behalf of Northern Light Health and our member organizations speaking in support of this bill. Northern Light Health member organizations include 10 hospitals located in southern, central, eastern and northern Maine, 8 nursing facilities, air and ground ambulance, behavioral health, addiction treatment, pharmacy, primary and specialty care practices and a state-wide home care and hospice program. Ninety three percent of Maine's population lives in the Northern Light Health service area. Northern Light Health is also proud to be one of Maine's largest employers with more than 10,000 employees statewide.

This bill establishes the Maine Rural Health Care Education Workforce Fund and provides \$500,000 to support primary care and health professions workforce development in rural parts of the State.

Despite the work being done at EMMC and other health centers and systems across the state to train the next generation of physicians, the current physician workforce shortage is only going to become worse unless some fundamental changes are made for the availability of medical school and residency opportunities to Mainers interested in pursuing medicine as a career. According to a 2018 report from the Center for Health Workforce Studies, nearly 43% of Maine's physicians were over the age of 55. That number rises to over 50% in our most rural counties.

According to the Graham Center and the American Medical Association, we know that more than half of practicing physicians work within 100 miles of where they trained either in medical school or residency. With this in mind and grant funding support from the Maine Department of Health and Human Services, a collaboration between Maine Medical Center, Central Maine Medical Center, and the Maine-Dartmouth Family Medicine Residency Program known as the MERGE Collaborative was created. The MERGE Collaborative has a mission to increase the number of clinical rotations in rural Maine communities for residents and fellows in accredited graduate medical education programs. With the grant funding resources we have built the framework for five new sites and created training programs for faculty at these and future sites. This collaborative serves as a model for future initiatives, but only if funding is available to sustain and grow such opportunities.

This bill also supports the long-term sustainability of rural clinical preceptor programs to support students in graduate and undergraduate nursing programs. Northern Light Health rural hospitals work collaboratively with Maine's nursing education programs providing clinical preceptors to support students to complete their clinical education in local communities leading to employment in rural locations when licensed as a Registered Nurse.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this important legislation.