

LD 1225 An Act to Amend the Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program

Testimony in Support April 14, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Lisa Harvey-McPherson, I am here today speaking in opposition to this bill on behalf of the Organization of Maine Nursing Leadership (OMNL) and Maine's Nursing Action Coalition (MeNAC).

OMNL represents nursing leaders from patients to policy. It is a professional organization that directs the course for nursing by promoting sound healthcare policies within our organizations and at the local, state, and national level. Towards this Mission, OMNL creates an environment that encourages collaborative partnerships.

The Maine Nursing Action Coalition was originally formed to advance the work of the Institute of Medicine's report on the Future of Nursing. The organization creates an environment that encourages networking, unity, and collaborative partnerships among all healthcare professionals and non-healthcare stakeholders across Maine.

I am in a unique position testifying in opposition to this bill as I participated, on behalf of OMNL, with the nursing advocacy effort that created the nursing education loan repayment program in 2005. We knew then that Maine would face a retirement cliff of our nursing education workforce, and we did not have the pipeline of faculty to create the nursing workforce for the future. Unfortunately, the program was created in statue and not funded. We were successful in funding the program in 2021 with \$1 million dollars and again in 2023 with another \$1 million dollars.

Maine's Nursing Action Coalition has let the work to research and publish data on Maine's nursing workforce over the past 10 years. Our colleague at the University of Southern Maine led the work to publish data on Maine's nursing education programs every 2 years. We know that there is a longstanding trend of more qualified nursing applicants than program capacity every year and we also know that nursing faculty are essential to expanding the capacity of our nursing education programs to graduate the workforce for the future.

Unfortunately, nurses who teach full time experience a decrease in salary when compared to nurses in health care settings. The average salary of a nurse in Maine is \$75,000. This baseline increases depending on shifts and specialty care units, it is common for nurses to earn nearly \$100,000 year depending on shifts and specialty. The average beginning salary for nursing faculty ranges from \$60,229 to \$66,277. Nursing faculty must also have a master's degree in nursing or a doctoral degree as a qualification to teach. So, nurses experience a salary reduction and higher educational cost burden when they chose nursing education as a profession. The nurse educator loan repayment program is specifically designed to address this challenge by supporting nurse educators by eliminating their debt burden for a master's degree or doctoral degree with a commitment to teach in Maine for at least 3 years.

So far 52 nurse educators are participating in the loan repayment program, of the original \$2 million dollars allocated \$624,000 remains to fund the program for multiple years. We have increased the number of full-time faculty from 171 in 2019/2020 to 183 in 2023/2024. We have also successfully increased the number of younger faculty with 49% of faculty under the age of 40 today, in 2020 only 20% of faculty were under the age of 40.

Last November Maine's Nursing Action Coalition released updated projections for Maine's nursing workforce. I have attached the infographic of the report to my testimony. Statewide nursing education and clinical site partnerships have successfully graduated more new nurses into the workforce. For the first time we have a positive trend of more younger nurses entering the workforce to replace retiring nurses and we have more mid-career nurses in the workforce - a critically important data point as we will hit an acceleration in demand for care. We do have a nursing workforce shortage that is driven by the aging of Maine's population that will require more nurses to care for them. Due to a large increase in the proportion of those aged 65+ (36% more from 2020 to 2030), the demand for RNs will increase, resulting in a shortage of 2,817 RNs in 2030.

Supporting nurse faculty with loan repayment for advanced education debt is working. This bill proposes to divert funding to pay for undergraduate debt. Nurses with associate degrees and bachelor's nursing degrees have more options for loan repayment as many of the hospitals in Maine have loan repayment programs. Today the statewide program that supports students to attend the community college nursing programs at no cost to the student doesn't produce a debt burden and these nurses can then pursue bachelor's degrees in nursing with tuition support from the hospital or health care employer.

If the committee chooses to explore undergraduate debt, which we do not support, we strongly urge the committee to require funds be allocated to advanced degree debt first and only consider undergraduate debt for faculty with a master's degree or doctoral degree and limit undergraduate funding in total to 20% of available funds in the nursing education loan repayment program.

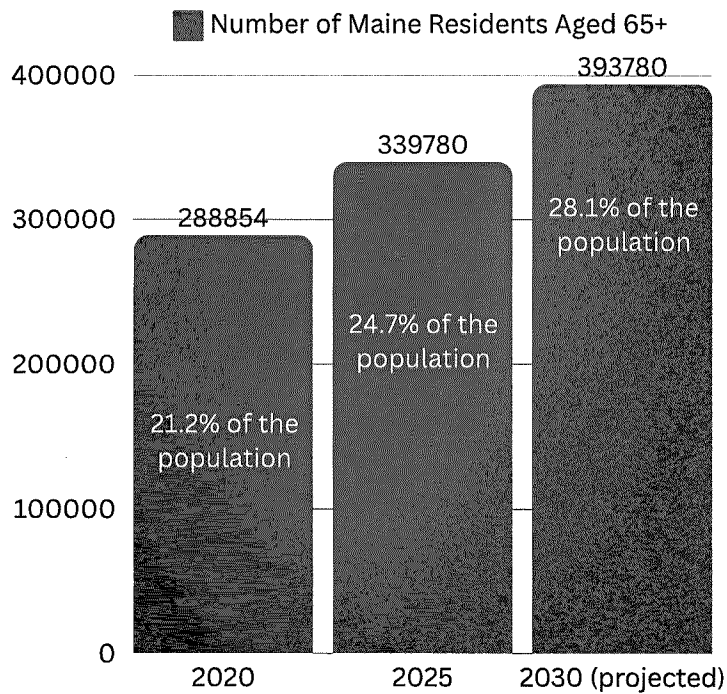
Thank you for the opportunity to speak in opposition to this bill.

The Nursing Workforce in Maine: A Supply and Demand Challenge

Age Trends of Maine's Population

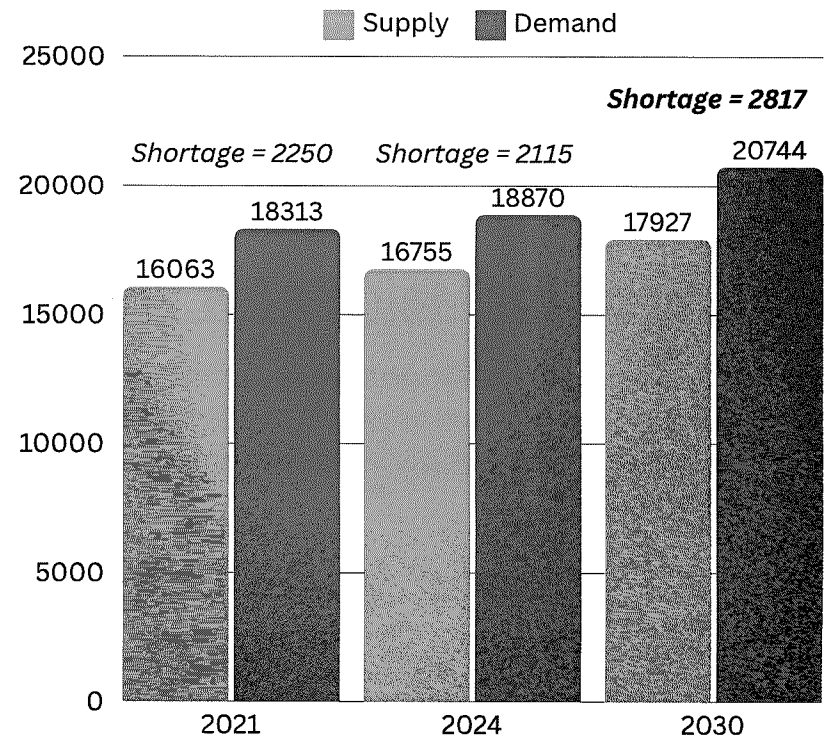
Those age 65+, on average, use 2-3 times the level of healthcare services than those younger.

Maine's older adult population is expected to grow by 36.2% between 2020 and 2030.



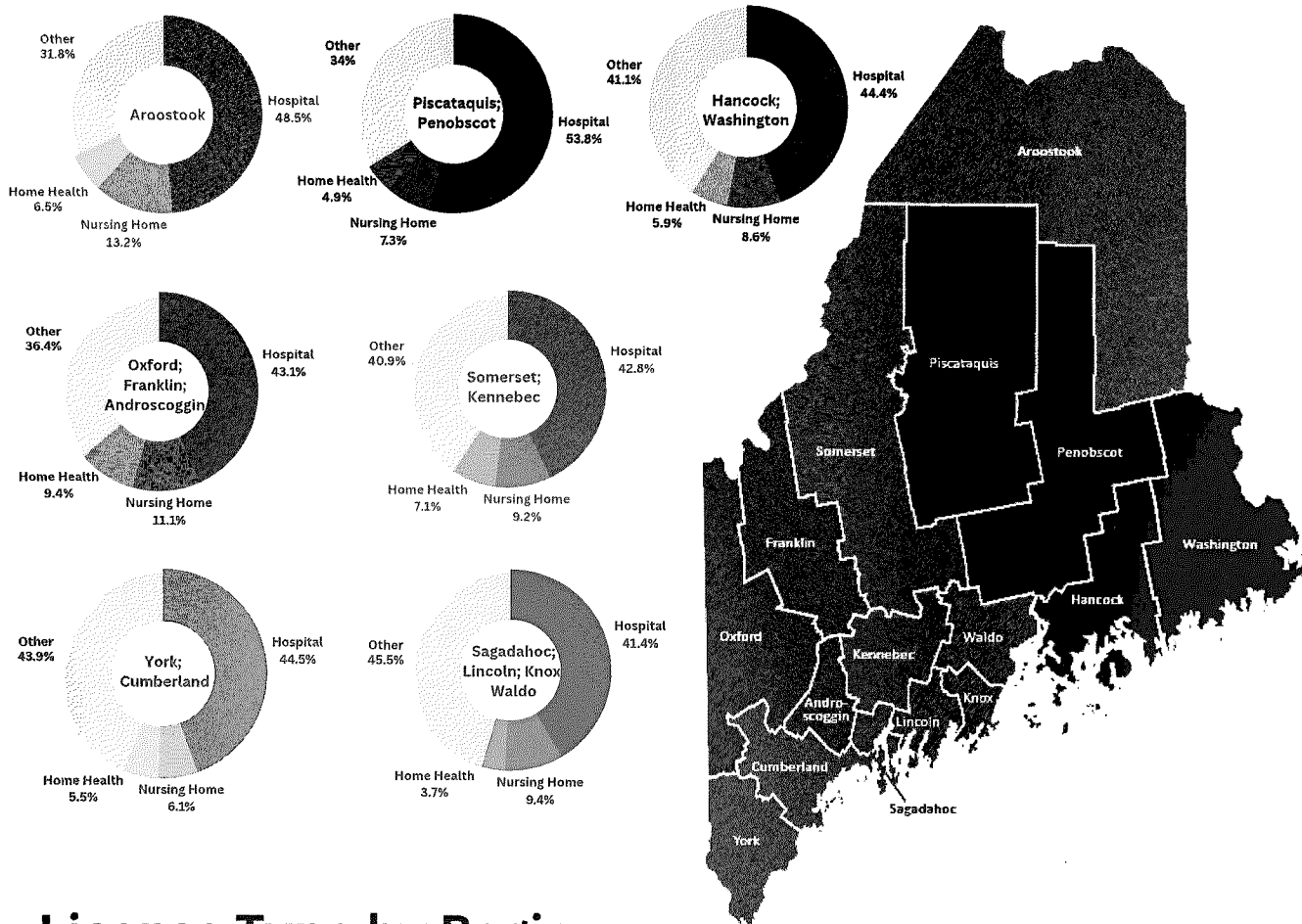
Forecast – Additional RNs Needed

Due to a large increase in the proportion of those aged 65+ (36% more from 2020 to 2030), the demand for RNs will increase, resulting in a shortage of 2,817 RNs in 2030.

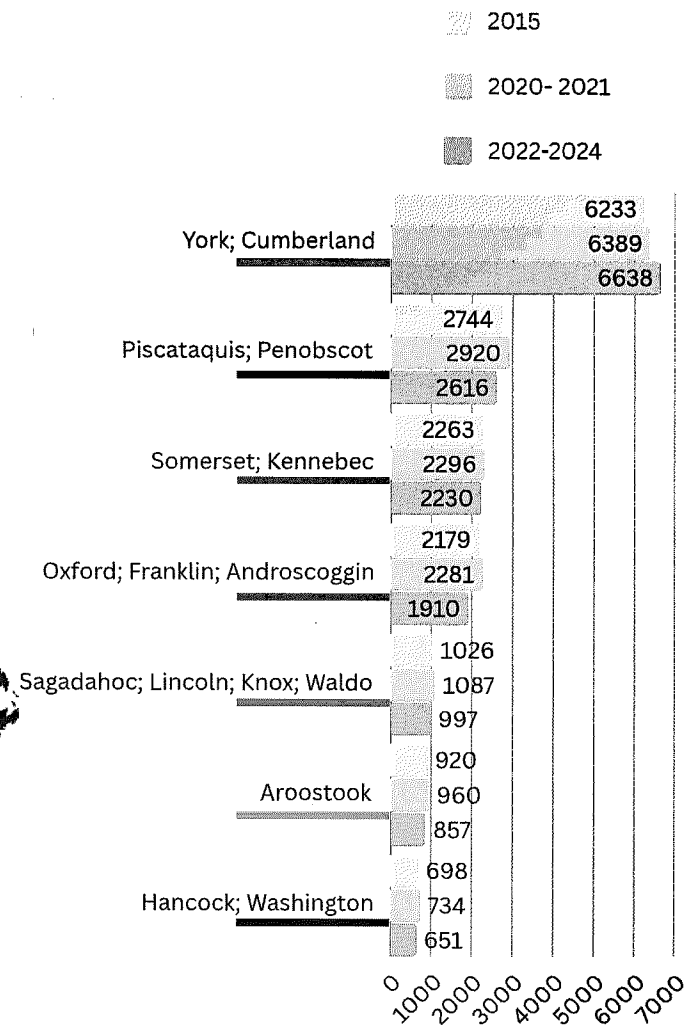


Workforce Setting by Region

While all care settings will be impacted, non-acute care settings are likely to see the largest surge in demand while subsequently having the least RNs working in those settings.



Working RNs by Region



License Type by Region

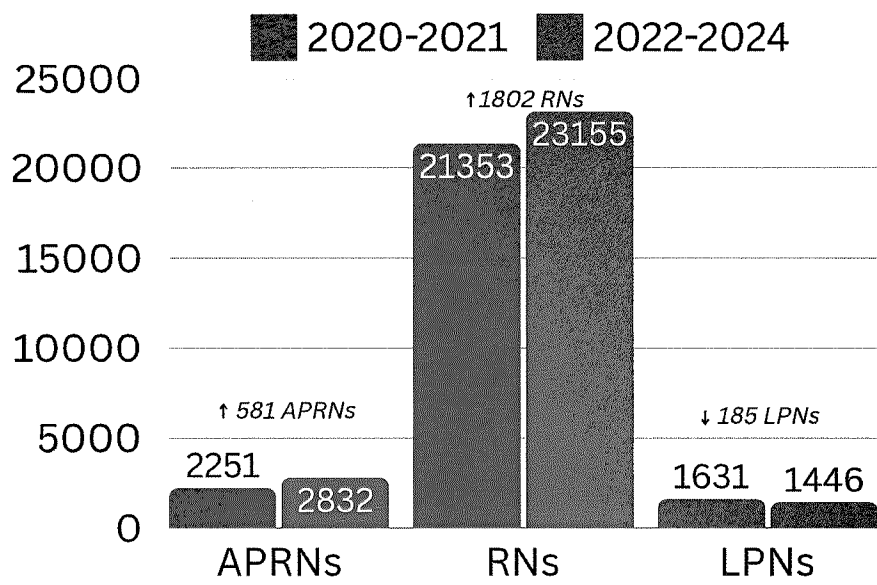
There are three levels of licensure for nurses in Maine: Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN), Registered Nurse (RN) and Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN). Below is a breakdown by region.

Region	APRNs '20/'21	APRNs '23/'24	RNs '20/'21	RNs '23/'24	LPNs '20/'21	LPNs '23/'24
Aroostook	10%	12%	82%	80%	8%	8%
Piscataquis; Penobscot	10%	11%	85%	85%	5%	4%
Hancock; Washington	10%	13%	83%	81%	7%	6%
Oxford; Franklin; Androscoggin	9%	11%	83%	81%	8%	8%
Somerset; Kennebec	9%	10%	85%	85%	6%	5%
York; Cumberland	11%	13%	84%	83%	5%	5%
Sagadahoc; Lincoln; Knox; Waldo	11%	13%	83%	81%	6%	5%

The need for more nurses will continue to grow and peak over the next 7 years. There are regional differences of expected need and anticipated shortages.

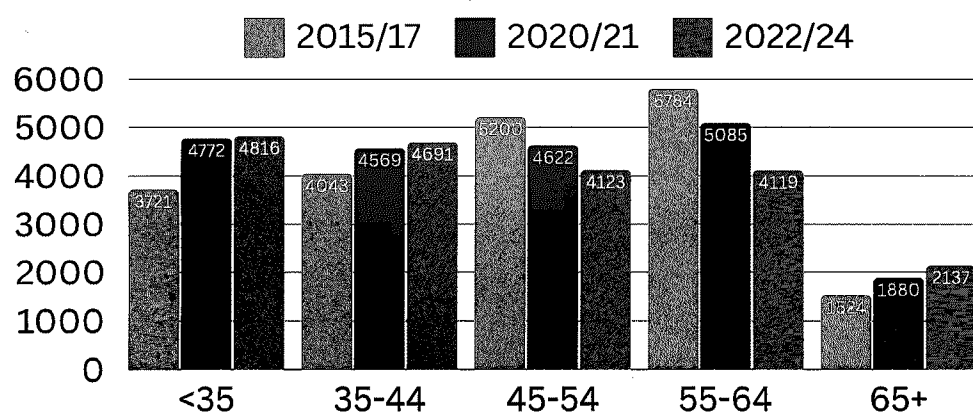
Strong efforts over the past 10 years have helped address the supply and demand challenges.

Trends in Nurses Licensed in Maine



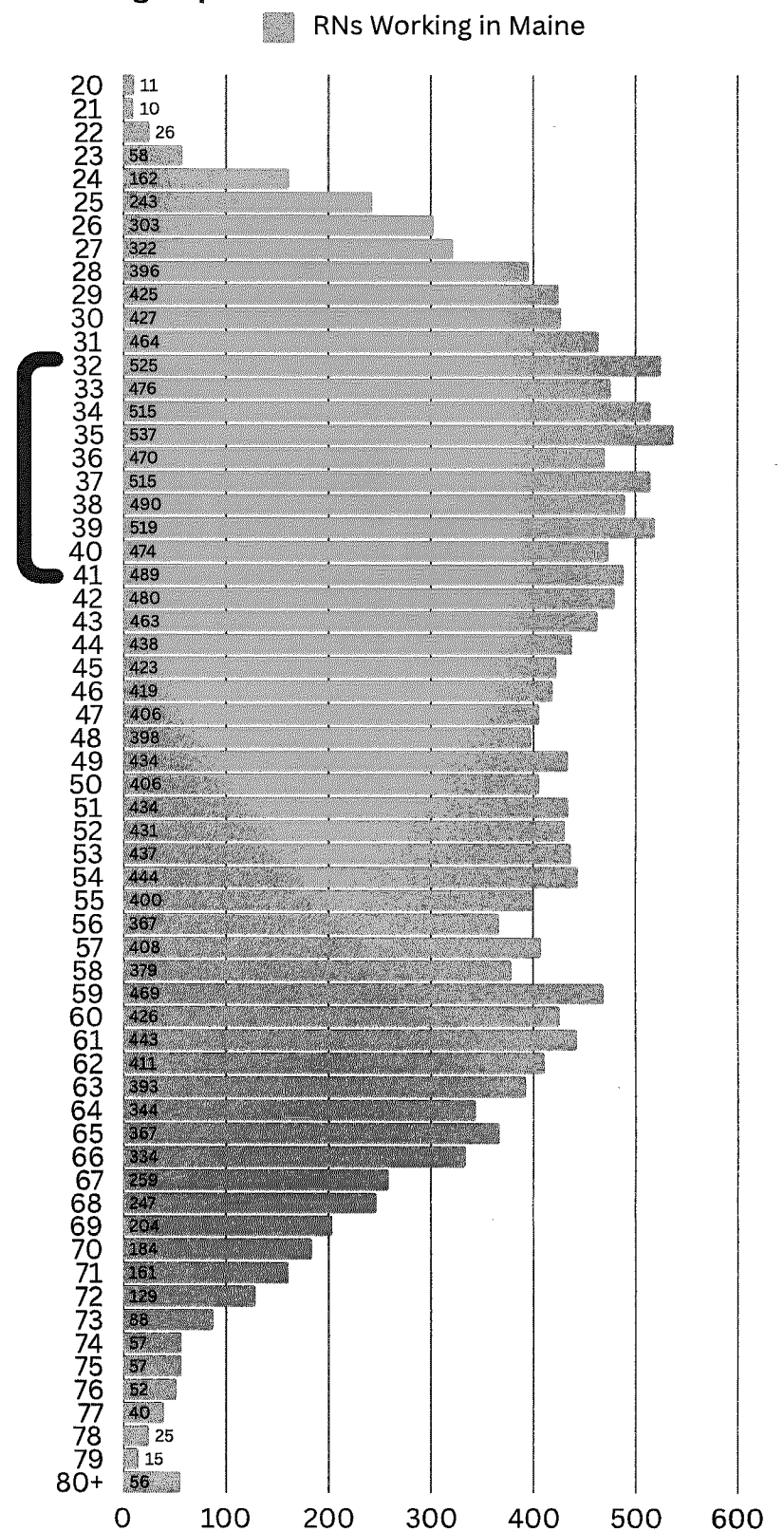
Age Trends for Maine's RN Workforce

Statewide nursing education and clinical site partnerships have successfully graduated new nurses into the workforce, resulting in a positive trend of younger nurses entering the workforce to replace retiring nurses.



Ages of Maine's RN Workforce

Here we show the exact age (in 2024) of RNs licensed by Maine. The largest 10-year cohort is the 32-41 group.



Good news: Maine has more mid-career aged nurses than other US states. As we hit the acceleration of demand that will peak in 2027, this workforce cohort will be critical.

TAKEAWAYS

What Can We Do

- Join nursing leadership organizations like Organization of Maine Nurse Leaders (OMNL) and Maine Nursing Action Coalition (MeNAC) to stay close to a collective solution.
- Convene and continue to align strategic priorities of nursing across organizations, academia and practice settings.
- Continue to educate and recruit while building pathways for all who face barriers to education, including New Mainers, who could help fill health care jobs in the state.
- Provide proper onboarding support, including education and training for preceptors. Explore solutions to procuring clinical faculty and placements for new and transitioning nurses.