



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
2 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002
(207) 287-1400

Michele Meyer

58 Odiorne Lane
Eliot, ME 03903

Phone: (207) 438-9197

Michele.Meyer@legislature.maine.gov

April 14, 2025

Testimony of Representative Michele Meyer in opposition to
**LD 1225, An Act to Amend the Nursing Education Loan Repayment
Program**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I am Representative Michele Meyer serving the residents of House District 150. I am also a registered nurse. I am here today to speak in opposition to this bill proposing changes to the Nursing Educator Loan Repayment Program to allow funds to be used for undergraduate loan debt for nursing faculty.

I sponsored LD 119, An Act To Increase Faculty in Nursing Education Programs by Amending the Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program, in 2021 to finally fund the nurse educator loan repayment program that was created by the Legislature in 2005 but never funded. My bill modernized the loan repayment program by increasing the amount of repayment to reflect the cost of obtaining a master's degree in nursing or a doctoral degree, which is a requirement to teach in a nursing education program. The amended version of the bill provided \$1 million in funding so that FAME could then operationalize the program and manage allocation of the funds. The bill was funded and then again in separate legislation in 2023 with another million dollars.

Maine's nursing workforce shortage is well documented. In 2017, Maine's Nursing Action Coalition reported a shortage of 3,200 RNs by 2025; in November of 2024, the projection was updated to a shortage of 2,817 RNs by 2030. The dynamics of the shortage are different in each of these time periods. In 2017, Maine's aging workforce was projected to retire at a rapid pace, and this has happened. In 2024, it is the aging of Maine's population that is increasing the demand for nurses between now and 2030. Older patients require more nursing care, and caring for Maine's aging population is a topic of frequent discussion in the Health and Human Services Committee.

When nursing leaders in Maine met with me about legislation regarding the nurse educator loan repayment program, I was impressed by the consistent data about applications to Maine's nursing

education programs. Programs receive more qualified applications than they can accept into the program each year. Many people in Maine want to become nurses; it is a personally rewarding career with a solid income and benefits that support individuals and families. It is also hard work, and increasing the number of nursing students in our education programs supports everyone, including patients and nurses caring for them.

- In 2020, 2,732 qualified applications were received and 1,947 accepted.
- In 2022, 3,073 qualified applications were received and 2,329 accepted.
- In 2024, 2,031 qualified applications were received and 1,946 accepted.

The challenge we have is a pipeline problem. We needed faculty to replace retiring faculty and overall more faculty to increase the number of students resulting in more graduates. I firmly believe that the nurse educator loan repayment program is a strong component of reaching our goal to accept all qualified nursing student applications for Maine's nursing education programs. With loan repayment funding, we have significantly increased the percentage of faculty that are younger, creating a larger number of faculty that will be teaching for many years.

Nurses that choose education as a career path make a difficult choice financially. They will have a significant reduction in pay and incur the cost of an advanced degree at the master's or doctoral level. The loan repayment program addresses the financial gap by eliminating the debt burden for the advanced degree.

This bill proposes to amend the use of the loan repayment fund to include undergraduate debt. I oppose this. When nurses graduate with their associate degree or bachelor's degree in nursing and begin their career, they often have more support with loan repayment by their employer, as many hospitals in Maine offer loan repayment as an incentive for new nurses seeking jobs. Funding that supports students to continue their education in one of Maine's community colleges is a way to start a nursing education program with no debt burden, and many of these new nurses will also have employer support to pay for tuition reimbursement when they pursue bachelor's degrees.

The nurse educator loan repayment program addresses a specific advanced degree financial challenge, and I oppose diverting the funds to pay for undergraduate debt. This is not how the program was designed, and the program has limited funding. Replenishing the fund will require action by a future legislature. It is my understanding that, of the original \$2 million, \$624,000 remains to fund the program into the future.

Thank you for your consideration.