



**Testimony by William Norbert
Governmental Affairs and Communications Manager**

In Support of L.D. 1225

An Act to Amend the Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program

April 14, 2025

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Bill Norbert. I am the Governmental Affairs and Communications Manager at the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME). I am presenting this testimony in support of L.D. 1225, *An Act to Amend the Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program*.

We first wish to thank Representative Roberts for sponsoring this bill, as well as the numerous cosponsors.

FAME's mission is to enrich business and educational outcomes through relevant, timely financial support to Maine's people. Our vision is a Maine where all people have access to improved economic outcomes through business growth and education attainment

This bill would modify the Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program, which is administered by FAME, by adding outstanding education loans relating to *an associate or bachelor's degree of any kind* to the list of debts that qualify for repayment under the program. This would be allowed regardless of whether the qualifying nurse educator has outstanding debts related to a master's or doctoral nursing degree. Under the bill, FAME would repay the loan for an associate or bachelor's degree up to \$20,000 for a qualifying full-time nurse and up to \$10,000 for a qualifying part-time nurse.

FAME has administered the Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program since it was first funded by the Legislature with federal pandemic relief dollars. The program was established for the purpose of increasing the number of nursing faculty in nursing education programs in the state. Program recipients may receive awards totaling up to \$40,000 depending on highest degree attained and work status. Full-time and part-time nurse educators are eligible to apply. Loan repayment awards are disbursed over a three-

year period. Awards are paid directly to a recipient's loan servicer. Participants must be a nurse; be currently enrolled in a master's or doctoral degree program in nursing or have completed a master's or doctoral degree in nursing; possess an outstanding education loan relating to the master's or doctoral nursing degree; and agree to work as full-time nursing faculty in a nursing education program in the state for a minimum of three years after acceptance to the program. FAME repays the loan of eligible nurse educators in the amount of up to \$20,000 over three years for a master's degree and up to \$40,000 over three years for a doctoral degree. Part-time faculty may receive up to \$10,000 over three years (master's degree) or up to \$20,000 over three years (doctoral degree).

Over the years, we have been approached by numerous participants and interested applicants asking whether their undergraduate student loan debt could qualify for repayment in this program. Many professionals at this level often have a mix of undergraduate and graduate debt they would like to pay off. We have had to tell them no, that the program only repays their debt related to a graduate degree. But as we know, in order to earn a graduate degree, a student must pass through the halls of undergraduate institutions, and many incur undergraduate and graduate debt. Our proposed amendment to the program will make the program available to more parties, especially individuals who often have more undergraduate debt than graduate debt. The change also should benefit nursing, nursing schools, and the health care industry by allowing for more instructors.

The program was first funded through federal pandemic relief dollars. Selection of 48 recipients occurred over four application cycles in November 2022, May 2023, October 2023, and February 2024. The 131st Legislature approved in the supplemental budget additional funding (\$1 million) for the program and expanded eligibility to include part-time nurse educators. We supported that program modification and support this proposed one, as well. We just concluded a fifth application cycle and received ten applications, all of which qualified for funding. We thus will be awarding \$238,334 in loan repayments for these ten nursing educators, bringing the total of program participants to 58. This will leave \$624,000 in state funding for the program.

We hope you will support making this program more flexible for its participants. Thank you for your consideration and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.