



An Act To Expand Nursing Education Programs

Testimony in Support

February 22, 2022

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee my name is Lisa Harvey-McPherson, and I am here today speaking in support of this important legislation on behalf of Maine's Nursing Action Coalition (MeNAC).

Nursing Action Coalitions were started by a partnership between AARP the AARP Foundation and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Nursing Action Coalitions were formed in every state and Washington, D.C. to carry out the work of the Campaign for the Future of Nursing at the local, regional, and state levels. In 2010, the IOM released The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health with the purpose of producing a report that would make recommendations for an action-oriented blueprint for the future of nursing. One of the recommendations focused on improving the effectiveness of nursing workforce planning and policy making with better data collection. MeNAC has focused our work on Maine's nursing workforce data.

MeNAC has produce two nursing workforce shortage projection reports. The first report issued in 2015 projected a shortage of 3200 RNs by 2025. We then updated our analysis in 2018 and projected that the shortage projection had improved to a shortfall of 2700 RNs by 2025. We are very close to completing our 2021 analysis of Maine's nursing workforce data and I hope to have this information for the work session. I have reviewed a preliminary report from our data consultant, and we do have positive trends. The largest increase in the number of licensed nurses in Maine are individuals younger than the age of 35 and our nursing education programs have increased the number of student graduates. We also know that nurses are essentially at full employment, but we still fall short of eliminating the nursing workforce shortage by 2025. This is the number we will be releasing once the report is final.

The most recent data set that we have regarding nursing is the Report on 2019/2020 Survey of Maine Nursing Programs prepared by Susan Sepples, PhD, Associate Professor of Nursing at USM and principal investigator for the report. The report shows that in 2020 Maine nursing education programs increased the number of associate degree graduates to 457 (up from 235 in 2017) and increased the number of bachelor's degree nursing graduates to 844 (up from 566 in 2017). We know that students from out of state attend our nursing schools due to the high quality of our education programs. So, we look at the number of nurses that pass the NCLEX RN first time test as an indicator of the number of new nurses that will practice in Maine. In 2020, 864 new licensed nurses passed the NCLEX exam, this is up from 768 in 2019.

While the trends are positive we are still challenged with nursing program capacity to accept all qualified candidates. In 2020 Maine's associate degree programs denied admission for 150 qualified applicants statewide, another 84 applicants were accepted but deferred. This data point emphasizes the important role that the bill before you today will have by providing financial resources to increase the number of Community College associate degree students annually.

I must also note that while the trends are positive health care employers in Maine are challenged to hire the number of nurses needed to fill vacant positions. This is due in part to the aging of Maine's nursing workforce which has accelerated retirements among our oldest nurses.

I want to close my testimony by thanking all of you for the Legislature's support to fund the nursing education loan repayment program in LD 1733 that passed last year. The nurse education loan repayment program was created in 2005 but never funded. With your support the loan repayment program now has \$1 million dollars to support repayment of nurse faculty student loans with a commitment of the applicant to teach full time in a Maine based nursing education program. This is an excellent start and the bill before you today builds upon this important work.

Thank you.