



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

Neither For Nor Against

L.D. 1693

***An Act to Advance Health Equity, Improve the Well-being of All Maine People and
Create a Health Trust***

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

February 4, 2022

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Bill Norbert. I am the Governmental Affairs and Communications Manager at the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME). I live in Brunswick and am submitting this written testimony Neither For Nor Against L.D. 1693, *An Act to Advance Health Equity, Improve the Well-being of All Maine People and Create a Health Trust*.

FAME takes no position on the bill's merits, including its proposed new Trust for a Healthy Maine in Part A. We certainly support the legislation's stated goals of ensuring adequate resources for disease prevention efforts, promoting public health, and planning and delivering public health and prevention programs and services. We simply wish to remind the committee that FAME has the privilege of administering two long-time, successful programs funded through the current Fund for a Healthy Maine: the **Maine Dental Loan and Loan Repayment Programs** and pass-through funds for the **Maine Area Health Education Centers (AHECs)**. Regardless of what happens, we hope these programs will continue to receive stable and consistent funding, whether through the tobacco settlement monies or direct appropriations. Please consider FAME as a resource during your deliberations.

FAME administers via the biennial budget two Fund for a Healthy Maine (FFHM) allocations: one is for the FAME-administered **Maine Dental Loan and Loan Repayment Programs** (currently \$237,740 in each year of the biennium), while the other is "pass-through money" that supports the University of New-England-administered **Maine Area Health Education Centers (AHECs)** (currently \$110,000 in each year of the biennium).

The **Maine Dental Education Loan and Loan Repayment Programs** provide need-based, forgivable loans to Maine residents pursuing post-graduate education in dentistry and loan repayment for dentists providing services to underserved populations in Maine. The FFHM allocations allow for the selection of new participants in the program and provide continued funding for students needing loans and loan repayment as dentists practicing in underserved areas in Maine. Through the funding, FAME is able to meet its commitment to existing program participants, as well as to add new participants. A commitment in this program is four years for both students receiving loans and for dentists receiving loan repayments. FAME has been able to leverage money in this program twice in the loan repayments program: once through a Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant, and another time with Delta Dental money. Thus, the program has been efficient and innovative.

For FY 21, the Maine Dental Loan Program disbursed \$415,000 in loans to assist 20 students. These students received between \$20,000 and \$25,000 each for their loans. The Maine Dental Loan Repayment Program spent \$145,000 to assist 7 dentists practicing in Maine. These loan repayment participants received payments ranging from \$10,000 to \$25,000, depending on the terms of their particular agreements. (Note: During FY 21, students with initial loan agreements prior to January 1, 2020 received \$20,000, while students with an initial loan agreement after January 1, 2020 received \$25,000 each for their loans. Similarly, the maximum annual award is \$20,000 for Maine Dental Loan Repayment recipients with agreements prior to January 1, 2020 and \$25,000 for Maine Dental Loan Repayment recipients with agreements on or after January 1, 2020.)

The **Maine Area Health Education Centers funding** is “pass-through” money that FAME transfers to the University of New England. This money helps to fund the rural health workforce development programs in the Area Health Education Centers, which are located in Bangor, Farmington, and Presque Isle. These funds are matched 1:1 by HRSA.

The AHEC network works to enhance the quality of and access to health care among underserved populations through experience based learning, and inter-professional and multidisciplinary partnerships. Key activities include:

- Provide rural, inter-professional, community-based clinical training experiences for health professions students
- Encourage Maine youth and mid-career professionals to pursue health careers
- Support practicing health professionals with continuing education and learning opportunities
- Promote population and public health approaches to addressing current and emerging health issues including COVID-19, opioid use disorder, and health equity.

We hope nothing in any new law would disrupt the funding relied upon by students and other beneficiaries of these two programs. They are very important. As you know, Maine has acute shortages of health care practitioners (be they dentists or primary

care and other health professionals). If this measure ultimately is enacted into law, we look forward to making the case for continued funding under the new arrangement for these vital and successful programs.

Thank you for consideration of my comments.