



TESTIMONY

In Support of

LD 119: An Act To Increase Faculty in the Nursing Education Programs by Amending the Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program

**Brenda Gallant
Maine Long-Term Care Ombudsman Program**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business

February 9, 2021

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Economic Advancement and Business

My name is Brenda Gallant. I am the Long-Term Care Ombudsman. The Ombudsman Program is a state-wide non-profit organization that provides advocacy for older adults and adults with disabilities who receive long-term services and supports throughout the state. We serve residents in nursing homes, residential care, assisted living facilities, adult day programs and recipients of home care services. Additionally, we serve patients in hospitals who experience barriers in accessing long-term care services when they are ready for discharge.

I am pleased to provide testimony in support of this legislation that requires the amendment of the nursing education loan repayment program to extend eligibility to apply to individuals who are currently enrolled in master's or doctoral programs, applicants must indicate an intention to work as a full-time nursing faculty in a nursing education program in the State and increases the required commitment from three to five years after acceptance into the nursing education loan repayment program and increases the maximum amount of loans eligible from \$4,500 to \$30,000 for a master's degree and from \$6,000 to \$60,000 for a doctoral degree.

Maine is facing a critical shortage of nurses impacting healthcare providers across the state including nursing homes and home health care. The availability of nursing staff has a direct impact on the quality of care provided to older and disabled residents in nursing homes. Maine nursing homes serve residents with acuity that is among the highest in the country. The presence of nursing staff is essential in assessing the needs of residents and is directly related to health outcomes for residents. Nurses also have an essential role in home care making it possible for older and disabled citizens with nursing care needs to remain independent in the community.

Maine has had an ongoing shortage of nurses. It is clear that we must develop a number of strategies to attract and retain nursing professionals. The current shortage of these professionals will worsen as Maine's aging

population continues to grow requiring an increasing number of nurses to provide care. Projections are that by 2025 Maine's estimated workforce shortage will reach 3,200. The availability of nursing instructors is critical to meet the increasing demand for nursing professionals. At present there are not enough instructors available in Maine limiting the number of nursing students.

This legislation would help in providing the support for nurses to pursue an advanced degree necessary for a position as an instructor.

Thank you for your consideration.