



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

Testimony in Support

February 9, 2021

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts and members of the Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business Committee, my name is Lisa Harvey-McPherson I am here today representing Maine's Nursing Action Coalition in support of this bill. The Maine Nursing Action Coalition (MeNAC) was formed with support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation as part of a national initiative to create state-based nursing coalitions to implement recommendations of the Institute of Medicine Report on the Future of Nursing. The focus of our work is developing the nursing workforce data set that identifies supply and demand data for nurses allowing us to identify Maine's nursing workforce shortage.

Before I comment specifically on the need for faculty loan repayment, I want to frame for you that this bill is a jobs bill. In nearly every Maine community health care employers are the largest employer, nursing is the often the largest employee sector of health care employers. We know that nurses across Maine are essential contributors to our economy and have a foundational role in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic in Maine. In every setting from bedside care to vaccine clinics nurses are caring for thousands of individuals and family members impacted by COVID-19.

To assist us with our work MeNAC engaged the Northeast Ohio Nursing Initiative (NEONI) to create a workforce projection model for nurses in Maine. NEONI has been successful in projecting nursing workforce data for Ohio and they also work with other states to project nursing workforce demand. MeNAC utilized the Maine Minimum Data Set, Maine census data, demographic data, employment setting data and projection on the intensity of nursing care required to model current and future workforce trends. The data was published in 2017, based on 2015 data. At that time we projected that Maine would have a shortage of 3200 Registered Nurses (RN's) by 2025 and was experiencing a real time nursing shortage. In 2015 Maine's nursing education programs graduated 650 new license eligible nurses, in 2017 the number of new graduates increased to 800. Based on the updated number of annual graduates we now project the shortage of RN's to be 2700 by 2025. In 2020 data collection was disrupted by COVID-19 so the most recent data we have is the number of first-time test takers for the nurse licensure exam in 2019. In 2019 there were 831 new nurse candidates for the licensing exam. We are making progress, but we are still short of graduating the 1050 new license eligible graduates each year to offset the shortage.

Maine began collecting supply side data from nurses in 2001, we have known for a very long time that nurses in Maine are on average older than nurses nationally. In 2020, 37% of registered nurses in Maine were over the age of 56. Fifty-eight percent of registered nurses are over the age of 46. Nationally the average is lower with less than half of RN's over the age of 50. Nursing education

faculty are among the oldest nurses in Maine with 38% of faculty over the age of 56. We projected many years ago that Maine's older nursing workforce, including faculty, would retire at a pace that exceeds the ability of nursing education programs to graduate the nurses needed to meet demand. Today we are living the projection, we have a faculty shortage and are fundamentally challenged to fill current vacant education positions to keep the baseline of students we currently graduate, let alone grow the programs to graduate the 1050 new nurses needed annually.

I have attached to my testimony an infographic on the regional differences of Maine's nursing workforce. We know where nurses are working and how old nurses are in each region. We also project the impact that Maine's aging population will have on the future demand for nurses. Along Maine's coast nearly 50% of nurses are over the age of 55. York and Cumberland Counties employ 39% of Maine's registered nurses and 40 % of nurses in this region are over the age of 55%. We also know that Aroostook County has the youngest co-hort of nurses with only 29% of the workforce over 55. The retirement cliff started in the county years ago and they have brought the highest regional percentage of younger nurses into the profession.

In 2005 the legislature passed a bill creating the Maine Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program located with the Finance Authority of Maine. Language was passed to create the program but unfortunately the bill didn't receive funding from the Appropriations Committee table. In fact, the program has never been funded. At that time legislators recognized the peril of the nursing workforce retirement cliff and the need to invest in faculty to build capacity to meet future student demand. I participated in late negotiations to fund the 2005 legislation and while we weren't funded legislators at the time expressed support to fund the program at a future date. The bill before you today fulfills that commitment.

I also want to emphasize we have enough applications to nursing programs today to effectively offset the shortage if they were accepted into one of the 15 nursing education programs in Maine. As I have noted nursing education data collection was disrupted due to COVID. Based the 2019 data that we have we know that 2602 applications were submitted for Maine's associate degree programs, of those 122 qualified applicants were denied. Available data for 2019 shows that 2872 applications were submitted to Maine's bachelor's degree programs and 98 qualified applicants were denied.

I also anticipate you have questions about the federally funded nurse loan repayment programs managed by HRSA. This is a highly competitive program for faculty loan repayment, in 2020 the federal government awarded \$26.6 million in nurse faculty loan repayment awards to only 81 nursing education programs to expand faculty. Maine did not receive any of this funding thus, nursing faculty don't benefit from this program and generally our nursing programs don't meet the funding preference threshold weighted for disadvantaged students.

The bill before you today adjusts the loan caps to reflect the current cost of obtaining the advanced degrees required to teach; \$30,000 for a master's degree and \$60,000 for a doctoral degree. The bill also increases the commitment to teach in a Maine based school of nursing to a minimum of 5 years to qualify for the loan program. We estimate that 25 master's applicants and 4 doctoral applicants could participate in the loan repayment program with \$1 million dollars in funding. Once funded FAME will develop rules to implement the nurse education faculty loan repayment program.