

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 Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business, my name is Sherry Rogers and I am the Chief Nursing Officer at Redington-Fairview General Hospital and I am here today to speak in support of this bill.

Redington-Fairview General Hospital is an independent community hospital located in Skowhegan, Maine. The hospital serves 30,000 people in Somerset County primarily along the Route 201 corridor to Jackman, Maine. We are a small 25 bed hospital but we have about 23,000 Emergency Room visits and 160,000 registrations per year. We employ about 200 nurses, 25% over the age of 55 and 40% over the age of 45. As a small hospital we employ fewer nurses than the larger hospitals but each and every vacant position has significant impact. In calendar year 2020 we spent \$661,301 and in 2019 we spent \$427,095 on travel nurses to fill critical positions. So that was over \$1 million dollars in travel staff in a 2 year period. For such a small hospital, that speaks volumes about how thin we are if somebody leaves or goes out of work for a medical reason.

As a nursing leader in Maine my colleagues and I have known for a very long time that nurses in Maine are older than nurses in other parts of the country and we would be significantly impacted by the retiring out of our professional nursing workforce. In the last 3 years 45% of nurses in leadership positions retired at our small hospital. We are eager to hire new nurses so they can gain experience and be able to fill future nursing vacancies. We offer student loan forgiveness and tuition assistance, spending about \$105, 547 to support our nurses annually but there are waiting lists to get into local schools. Prior to the COVID 19 pandemic, we were even looking into hiring foreign nurses to meet our needs. We support nursing education. We offer clinical rotations to students. We partner with schools to pay our staff to be their instructors, which is great, but all the costs should not be put on hospitals to fix this problem. We know nursing faculty are needed to increase Maine's nursing workforce.

Despite our effort and investment, we simply cannot increase the number of nursing graduates without replacing retiring faculty and increasing the overall number of faculty in Maine's nursing education programs. The bill before you today provides loan repayment to nurses completing masters or doctoral degrees who commit to teach for 5 years in one of our nursing education programs. The nurse faculty loan repayment program was created in 2005 as we predicted the very situation we are experiencing today. Now is the time to fund the loan repayment program.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this important legislation.