

Susan B. Sepples PhD, RN
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Portland, Maine 04010

**In Support of LD 119, *An Act To Increase Faculty in Nursing Education Programs*
by Amending the Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program
Feb. 9, 2021**

Dear Senator Curry, Representative Roberts and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business (IDEA). I am responding as a faculty member and long term advocate of this bill. My name is Dr. Susan Sepples, I am a senior nursing faculty member at the University of Southern Maine (USM) and the PI since 2008 on a project to collect and interpret longitudinal data on Maine's faculty workforce. Data has been collected on the nursing faculty workforce since 2005, annually through 2010 and bi-annually since that time. The last survey collected data through 2019 and because of significant issues of participation, we will return to an annual survey, with data through 2020 slated to be collected in March. The complete data set is open access and housed at <https://usm.maine.edu/nursing/nursing-workforce-data-state-maine>.

There are now 15 nursing programs in Maine, six private and nine public. Seven offer an associate degree (AD), eight offer a baccalaureate in science (BS), three an accelerated baccalaureate (ABSN--a 15-18 month program for students with a baccalaureate degree in another field), five schools offer the RN-BS program to advance students from the AD to the BS and five offer an MS, one of which is a direct entry masters for students with another degree. Several schools are developing DNP programs.

Despite a steady increase in number of programs, variety of programs and number of students accepted and retained in the state's nursing programs, the increase continues to fall short of the projected need for nurses in the state. The problem is not qualified students, the number of qualified and denied students across both AD and BS programs continues to be high while the number of faculty continues to decline. In 2019 the estimate is that there are less than 143 fulltime nursing faculty. Of schools reporting in the 2019 survey, 33 percent of fulltime nursing faculty were doctorally prepared and 56% held a master's in nursing.

In 2017, 24 percent of Maine's nursing faculty were over the age of 60, in 2019 that is up to 27 percent. The beginning salary for Maine's nursing faculty in 2019 was \$55.7K

for those with a master's degree in nursing and \$66.5K for doctorally prepared faculty. This remains significantly below what these nurses could be making in practice and this seriously impacts our ability to recruit. .

In the 2019 survey, even with missing data from three schools, the projected number of estimated faculty losses and need for replacement was for 13 faculty positions in the next year. The COVID epidemic has put pressure on all schools to continue to graduate students using the tools of remote learning and virtual simulation. The enormous responsibility for the continued safe education of students in the face of decreased opportunities for clinical, lab, and hands on simulation has taken a toll and many schools have lost faculty.

Maine has increased its number of first time test takers for state licensure by 28 percent over the last decade, continuing to graduate more students year after year and even in this, our most difficult of years.

<https://www.maine.gov/boardofnursing/education/nclex-pass-rates.html>

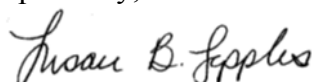
The challenges of this pandemic for many industries has been tremendous. For the faculty workforce, these challenges will affect our ability to continue to grow Maine's nursing workforce even at the pace that was already insufficient two years ago. Sustaining the quality and number of graduates needed for Maine's nursing workforce is essential to Maine's future. Investing now in a rebuilding of that workforce is essential to the health and safety of Maine's most vulnerable citizens.

Every school in Maine could increase its nursing program today if we could build our faculty. We must create incentive for nurses to invest in graduate education to become the teachers for our next generation of essential workers. Without support for graduate education, many nurses, often the primary wage earners for their families, cannot take the risk of stepping out of their current jobs to move into this work. This program to fund graduate education is really a program to fund our future healthcare workforce.

As a nurse educator in Maine for nearly 25 years, I often caution my students to look for the keystone issue in addressing a problem. Creating an act to support nursing education addresses the nursing workforce shortage at its keystone issue.

Submitted, February 8, 2021

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Susan B. Apples".

Susan B. Sepples RN, PhD
Associate Professor of Nursing
University of Southern Maine School of Nursing