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Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business  
Maine State Legislature

Dear Committee Members,

Good morning. I am writing this letter as my testimony of support for Maine House Bill 119, An Act to Increase Faculty in Nursing Education Programs by Amending the Nurse Education Loan Repayment Program. In 2017 the Maine Nursing Action Coalition projected the state of Maine will have a shortage of 3,200 Registered Nurses by the 2025. Alarmingly, the same organization has more recently projected a shortage of 39 nursing faculty vacancies over the next five years. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) recently released their annual report titled *Special Survey on Vacant Faculty Position for Academic Year 2020-2021*. Current data reveals that 52.1% of nursing programs have at least one full-time faculty vacancy. The same report reveals that the inability to recruit qualified faculty because of competition for jobs with other marketplaces (27.2%) and that qualified applicants for faculty positions are unavailable in the geographic area (25.7%) are two identified barriers to hiring full-time faculty (Fang, Keyt, & McFadden, 2021). Providing financial support for Registered Nurses who have completed or are in the process of completing a master's degree or a doctoral degree is an incredible incentive. Not only do nurses experience a significant decrease in pay when leaving the practice setting to enter into academia, but they have also spent a considerable amount of money to complete the educational requirements necessary to know how to properly prepare new, competent, and safe nurses.

I was fortunate to complete my Master's in Nursing at the University of Oklahoma where a donor had made a generous donation to the College of Nursing. This allowed me to complete an accelerated program at a reduced price allowing me to get into the academic setting more quickly and without a heavy financial burden. When I considered going back for my PhD in Nursing, the financial cost was a significant concern. I completed my PhD in Nursing at Oklahoma City University where the overall cost for the program was approximately \$80,000. Again, the financial burden of an advanced degree in nursing is significant and often one that most cannot accept.

The state of Maine, in addition to the entire country, will continue to experience a significant shortage of nurses in the future. Our state will also be subject to the nationwide faculty shortage. The current pandemic has put a more severe burden on our nurses and healthcare systems potentially increasing the already concerning nursing shortage. A considerable effort will be needed to address this critical issue. Please vote to support our nurse and nursing faculty that are working so hard to provide safe, caring, and competent care throughout our state.

Respectfully,  
Erin C. Stratton PhD, MS, RN