

Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business Committees, attn: Kristen Bowker  
c/o Legislative Information Office  
Cross Building, Room  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: LD #:632: An Act to Amend the Social Work Education Loan Repayment Program

Dear Members of the Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business,

My name is Makenzie Handley, and I am a senior social work student at the University of Maine in Orono. I am from Maine, and I have lived here my entire life. I reside in Bangor, ME, and graduated from John Bapst High School in Bangor, Maine. This is the place where I found out I wanted to help people. The teachers and educators there always supported their students; I wanted to pass this on. However, I am coming to the end of my education for my bachelor's degree, and I am faced with a financial crisis.

When I started college, the gas price was around \$ 2.30-2.50 per gallon. While going through college, it got up to almost \$5-6 dollars per gallon. Being a full-time student, working part-time, and more recently going to my internship part-time, I have had to take out loans to pay for school. This year in looking for a job, I have become stressed and shocked at the pay rate I am looking at getting. The prices of everything have risen quite significantly since the start of my schooling. With the rate of pay, the cost of living, and the student loan payment, I would have an immense amount of trouble trying to afford to live. I am not alone in this thought process. Many of my classmates feel the same. We have set ourselves up to become individuals that strive to advocate for and help others. But these obstacles make it almost impossible for us to stay in the field of social work. With this legislation, the social work community will be able to solve staff retention problems by helping newly graduated students remain in the state of Maine. Many agencies struggle to get new employees or keep the ones they have due to the rate of pay and the rise in living costs. Being able to help students with loan debt will increase the number of people that stay in the state. Which in turn allows more people who can retrieve help in our social work community. Many places have very long waitlists to get social services due to low staffing. Not only is this beneficial to social workers, but it increases the quality of lives of Maine citizens in need.

Please vote "Yes" on LD 632

Respectfully submitted,

Makenzie Handley