

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 Cat Sabourin and I am a senior student majoring in social work and minoring in disability studies at the University of Maine, Orono. Although I am originally from Massachusetts, my love for Maine has grown after beginning my college education here in 2019. I began here as an education major though that shortly changed to social work as I realized I desired to make changes and help people outside of the classroom, and rather in their homes. A very large portion of work as a social worker is to be present, mentally *and* physically, to engage in people's active lives, as it can make all the difference to be physically present when working with others' mental health.

Just about three years ago, we were hit with the coronavirus pandemic. During this time my freshman year of college was about two months away from coming to an end. Along with this, I was also in the process of switching my major from education to social work. Transitioning all learning platforms to be online created much confusion and we heard of many students struggling to keep moving forward. Thus, the fall of 2020 came around and a very decent amount of the student body had decided to either transfer or drop out due to remote education. During this time, I knew I had a passion for social work though it was difficult to put it into perspective as I could not build a relationship with my professors as we were distanced by Zoom calls and terrible internet connection. Many students became discouraged during this time of frustration as what was coming for us was unknown, no one knew what our futures would look like with an online degree, especially social work students. I say this because in order to be an influential social worker, one must be present. Sitting behind a phone or a camera, and talking to someone does not have the same impact as being face-to-face, having the ability to see, feel, and understand every emotion present. This being said, I believe that with this legislation, social work students that had struggled during this time of confusion may receive back the money that was paid for these remote classes and put it towards more education and possibly a master's degree. I give recognition to those that remained students during the uncertainty of the pandemic as a lot of those who struggled may end up being our future social workers' clients. With receiving money back to help pay for student loans, one may find more interest in staying in

Maine due to access to housing as well as to find the reasoning to go back to school for a master's in social work. This loan forgiveness may increase the percentage of social workers in Maine as students are more likely to be able to afford to live here as well as have a better opportunity for finding social work jobs. An increase in the number of social workers in Maine will benefit the community as waitlists for services will be shortened as staffing will increase. This generation of social workers will be very understanding and influential as we all were during the time of the pandemic.

Please vote "Yes" on LD 632

Thank you for your time.

With Respect,

Cat Sabourin