

Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business  
c/o Legislative Information Office  
Cross Building, Room 206  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

**Re: LD 632: *Testimony in Support of LD 632***

Dear Senator Curry, Representative Craft, and other members of the Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business,

My name is Ashley Ames and I am a Junior Social Work major at the University of Maine in Orono. I am a concerned student *in favor* of LD 632 for two reasons — one is specific to myself and my circumstances, while the other is more generalized. I am a 21 year old full time student who works very hard to do well in school without my family's assistance. Last semester I achieved a 4.0 GPA, but I am worried about my future grades as I am solely responsible for my own finances and it has been very stressful. With another year to go, I have found myself in almost \$100,000 worth of debt. According to Educationdata.org, the average borrower in the state of Maine is over \$33,000 in debt and the average social worker in the state makes around \$55,000 a year. The problem of student loan debt and lack of pay drives young individuals and social workers to seek opportunities outside of Maine and severely restricts those who stay.

After I graduate, I am very eager to start working as a social worker, but am concerned that I will have to find employment in a higher earning industry. I have personal experience with Maine's massive, incapacitating mental health crisis that is currently taking over. Social services are needed to help with this crisis and our state already has a huge lack of social workers. Many graduates are considering other careers until they can pay off their debt and I am concerned for people in need. Life has not been easy for anyone lately, and the effects of this mental health epidemic will be felt, and they will be profound.

Please consider supporting LD632. If not for the Social Workers of Maine, vote “*yes*” for Maine residents as a whole.

Respectfully submitted,

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Overton, P. (2022, February 19). *Maine considers \$42 million plan to Lighten College Graduates' debt load*. Press Herald. Retrieved March 12, 2023, from <https://www.pressherald.com/2022/02/18/maine-considers-42m-plan-to-lighten-college-debt-load/#:~:text=According%20to%20the%20U.S.%20Department,than%20the%20New%20England%20average.>