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United Way  
of Southern Maine



Hello Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business. My name is Taylor Cray, and I am the Outreach Team Leader for Advocacy at Preble Street. I am writing to you today to ask that you please vote in favor of LD632: An Act to Amend the Social Work Education Loan Repayment Program.

Each day when I come to work, I do so alongside countless other individuals who dedicate their time and energy to the care and stability of others. Preble Street is just one of the many social service providers across Maine that supports people experiencing homelessness, hunger, and poverty in our communities. Oftentimes, folks within these communities are also struggling with a variety of other difficulties, all of which must be addressed with compassion, empathy, and care. Food insecurity, substance abuse, mental illness, and myriad other issues compound to create barriers that can seem insurmountable. Trained, professional social workers at Preble Street and other organizations are a critical resource for folks who might otherwise be without access to what is frequently life-saving care. While this work can be incredibly rewarding, there is also a very real emotional and psychological toll that social workers must bear when consistently providing such a breadth of care.

Many social workers go above and beyond each day simply because they do not want to see their clients suffer any more than necessary while navigating the broken social systems that exist in our society. As the cost of living continues to rise, more and more social workers must take on multiple jobs to remain stably housed and fed, while also attempting to pay off student debt and other expenses. The exhaustion that results from this kind of exertion cannot be understated. Social workers cannot show up for their clients, their coworkers, and their communities if they do not have the time they need to rest and recuperate.

The State of Maine cannot afford to lose any more social workers; Preble Street currently has 62 open positions and is continuously looking to fill them with qualified, professional social workers. As our population ages, our rates of homelessness rise, substance use continues to take the lives of Mainers, and our mental health crises continue to grow, we need social workers more than ever.

Providing student loan relief to those who have graduated with a degree in the field is a vital step in ensuring that Maine continues to retain qualified social workers who will continue to assist individuals, families, and communities across Maine. Reducing the burden of educational loans on social workers will help social services agencies to retain staff, maintain supportive and consistent relationships with clients, and allow programs providing critical services to our most vulnerable Mainers to operate at full capacity. As a state, we must see an investment in social workers as an investment in the future of Maine. This bill is a long-overdue step to ensure that this investment continues. Please vote to support LD632.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Taylor Cray

Advocacy Outreach Team Leader

Preble Street

