

March 13, 2023

Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business
Attn: Kristen Bowker, Cross Building Room 206

Testimony in Support of LD 632: *An Act to Amend the Social Work Education Loan Repayment System*

Dear Senator Curry, Representative Roberts and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business,

My name is Angela Rothwell. Currently, I am senior at the University of Maine at Orono, majoring in social work with a minor in child and family development. This summer I begin the master's program as I move toward becoming a licensed clinical social worker. My intent is to work with children and families upon certification.

Discouragement with the lack of behavioral health supports for children and adults in my community factored into my decision to return to college as a nontraditional student. The situation has become so dire in midcoast Maine that recently an emergency forum was called of local educators, health professionals and social service agencies. The goal: to find new and innovative ways to address the shortage. We must address this rapidly growing health crisis and help our most vulnerable populations. I want to be part of that solution.

Maine desperately needs more social workers. But it's a difficult profession to commit to when you're saddled with college debt. I've been fortunate thus far to only have minimal loans, but I've still sacrificed a great deal to get to this point. I've left a full-time job for a low paying internship despite having three children to support. Next year when I enter grad school, it will be even more difficult. My next internship will be unpaid. I will need student loans and incur more debt, which will be compounded by my loss of income over the past two years. It's a choice I've willingly made because I want to do meaningful work in my community, but not without a price.

However, my situation pales in comparison to my fellow students. I see their worry, and I hear their stories. They arrive in class exhausted, having worked late the night before as servers or in other retail jobs just because they need to make rent, buy groceries, and pay for gas. Some travel home on weekends and school breaks simply to work other jobs and get a good meal. They stress over every nonessential purchase. Some use the school food bank for essentials to get them through leaner times. They are frequently sick because they are overworked trying to do it all, yet still make it to class. And most importantly, they wonder how they'll pay their loans after graduation.

Social workers earn modest incomes. Those who enter the profession know that they can earn more elsewhere, but they do it anyway. It's a helping profession, with people who care deeply for others and want to make meaningful change. However, mounting student loan debt can be a difficult burden to carry. This bill will go a long way in helping me and my fellow graduates stay in our beautiful state and do the work we love.

I strongly urge you to vote "YES" on LD 632

Respectfully,
Angela Rothwell

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