

Testimony of Katie Fullam Harris
MaineHealth
In Opposition to a Cut Including in LD 221
The Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget
Before the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations & Financial
Affairs and Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and
Commerce Committees
February 24, 2021

Senator Breen, Representative Pierce, Senator Curry, Representative Roberts and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committees of Appropriations and Financial Services and Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Commerce, I am Katie Fullam Harris of MaineHealth, and I am here to testify in opposition to a specific cut to the budget of the Finance Authority of Maine.

MaineHealth is Maine's largest integrated non-profit health care system that provides a full continuum of health care services to the residents of eleven counties in Maine and one in New Hampshire. Our scope of services range from primary and specialty physician services to a continuum of behavioral health care services, community and tertiary hospital care, home health care and a lab.

I am here to testify in strong opposition to the elimination of the line item on Page A-206 of the budget that cuts funds in the amount of \$400,000 per year for the Doctors for Maine's Future Scholarship Program.

More than a decade ago, and as part of its vision of "Working Together so Our Communities are the Healthiest in America," MaineHealth recognized the opportunity to fill a major workforce gap by developing a state-specific program to train future physicians.

At the time, Maine was ranked 49th in the rate of students attending allopathic medical school, in part because we had no state-sponsored medical school of our own. MaineHealth's academic teaching hospital, Maine Medical Center, found an innovative partner in Tufts University, and the Maine Track program was founded.

Today, Maine Track students spend their first year in Boston with all first year Tufts Medical School students, and the next three years are spent learning at sites across the State. From Caribou to Biddeford and Norway to Belfast, medical school students get immersed in all aspects of care delivery throughout Maine. The Maine Track program has a specific focus on rural health care, ensuring that students understand the unique aspects of serving vulnerable populations across the state.

In addition to its unique curriculum, the Maine Track program guarantees 20 scholarships annually to students with strong ties to Maine to help defray the massive debt that so

often causes students to pursue higher paying specialties over primary care. To date, eight of these scholarships each year have come through the public/private partnership that was passed by the 124th Legislature called the Doctors for Maine's Future Program.

The Doctors for Maine's Future scholarship program is intended to provide up to eight scholarships annually – four each to UNE and the Maine Track program – to support medical school students with close ties to Maine who attend medical schools in Maine. In turn, the medical schools are required to provide 1:1 matches for each scholarship, thus supporting 16 students in each class. It is a great bang for the State's buck.

This partnership between the schools and the State has proven highly successful, with over 56% of the Doctors for Maine's Future scholars who have completed their training now practicing in Maine, of whom 40 are MaineTrack graduates. And more than 50% of our graduates do their residencies in primary care. This is comparable with the most successful rural-focused medical school programs in the country.

According to the American Association of Medical Colleges (AAMC), the median cost to attend medical school for four years is \$330,180 for private schools and \$250,222 for public schools. These astronomical costs result in high debt burden for students: graduates of private medical schools graduate with a median debt of \$215,000. The Doctors for Maine's Future scholarships help to reduce the debt burden to Maine students, providing them with greater opportunity to stay in Maine and choose primary care or other lower paying specialties.

And it is working. According to the AAMC, Maine saw a 12.2% increase in matriculants to medical school between 2019 and 2020, by far the highest percentage increase in New England. The Northeast region as a whole saw only a 2% increase. We continue to have relatively low rates of applicants who matriculate in medical school, but this program is making a big difference. It's a public/private investment that Maine can't afford not to make.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I would be happy to answer questions.