

MaineHealth

MaineHealth Local Health Systems

Franklin Community
Health Network
LincolnHealth
MaineHealth Care At Home
Maine Behavioral Healthcare
Memorial Hospital
Maine Medical Center
NorDx
Pen Bay Medical Center
Southern Maine Health Care
Synernet
Waldo County General Hospital
Western Maine Health

Part of the MaineHealth Family

MaineHealth Accountable
Care Organization

MaineHealth Affiliates

MaineGeneral Health
Mid Coast-Parkview Health
New England Rehabilitation
Hospital of Portland
St. Mary's Health System

Testimony of Paula White, MS RN MaineHealth/Maine Medical Center In Strong Support of LD 119, “An Act to Increase Faculty in Nursing Education Programs by Amending the Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program” Tuesday, February 9, 2021

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business, I am Paula White and very pleased to be with you today in strong support of LD 119, “An Act to Increase Faculty in Nursing Education Programs by Amending the Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program.”

Born and raised in Maine, I received my undergraduate and graduate degrees in nursing through the University of Maine system. My nursing career has been Maine-based from clinical practice in critical care to professional development, outreach education cooperatives, and various State nursing workforce initiatives. Since 2003 I have been the Director and now Senior Director for the Center for Clinical & Professional Development & Nursing Academic Affairs at Maine Medical Center and MaineHealth.

Across the country, and like many rural states, Maine faces a shortage of healthcare professionals, which presents particular challenges as we seek ways to improve the health of our communities. These challenges are compounded by current and predicted state trends in the population growth of a rapidly aging population.

Almost a decade ago, in anticipation of nursing shortages, MaineHealth CNOs recognized our clinical sites were not maximizing clinical placements for nursing students. In a unified effort we supported the implementation of a centralized electronic clinical placement system (CCPS) for undergraduate nursing students. This system, through the Massachusetts Department of Education, had proven effective for hospitals and nursing programs in Massachusetts and New Hampshire with a 30% increase in placements. In 2012, MaineHealth invested in Phase I of this initiative with 8 of then 13 academic programs. We championed Phase II in 2013, engaging additional hospitals throughout Maine and all 13 nursing (now 15) programs. The system continues to prompt better communications among the users resulting in expansion of placement opportunities.

As noted in prior testimony, in January 2017, a shortage of 2,700 RN's by 2025 in Maine was predicted if nursing education programs did not expand enrollments and graduates. It was estimated that in order to meet nursing workforce demands we would need to graduate an additional 400 new nurses per year over and above the approximate 750 that graduated in 2016. To date, in 2020, we have not begun to expand the numbers of new grads given that only 795 graduates passed licensing exams on their first attempt in 2019. Of those, not all stayed in Maine.

To address the growing shortage of nurses, MaineHealth has made significant investments in our recruitment efforts and to help "grow our own." MaineHealth has partnered with all 15 nursing programs in the state to help our own employees grow in their careers, by supporting entry level employees' enrollments in nursing programs, and the progressive development of our nurses who wish to advance their education and careers by pursuing a master's or doctoral degrees.

We have also engaged in a variety of creative approaches with our academic partners over the years in attempts to support increased student enrollments in which we provide clinical instructors from among our expert RN staff and preserve their salaries and benefits at our own costs. It is important to note that nurse faculty salaries are below those of clinical salaries (nurses in patient care settings) and additional education debt is often a deterrent from seeking advanced degrees. Also of note is a high turnover rate in clinical adjunct faculty, in part because of the financial disparities in roles and added burden of education debt.

In November of 2020, I personally completed one-on-one 60 minutes phone interviews with the leadership of each of Maine's 15 nursing programs to explore their attempts and obstacles to increasing student enrollments and how MaineHealth practice sites might be more supportive. Despite increases in program applicants, many are turned away due to the need for increased resources. Across the board, the major theme was the lack of qualified faculty for both classroom and clinical settings. We are looking to convene a summit with MaineHealth CNOs and Nursing Academic leadership this spring to explore opportunities for moving forward.

In 2020, MaineHealth filled 759 RN positions with external hires, including new graduate nurses, but 457 positions remain vacant. It is clear that our efforts are not enough and more faculty and clinical instructors are desperately needed

to increase enrollment in the state's nursing programs and meet the growing demand for nurses

Recognizing these challenges, the Legislature created in 2005 the Nurse Faculty Loan Repayment Program. The legislation before you today amends the program to more accurately reflect the estimated cost of a master's and doctoral degree in nursing. Hospitals and the state's nursing programs have made inroads in addressing the shortage, but legislative action is needed if we're going to be successful in meeting the increased workforce demands. With that said, I plead with this Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 119, An Act to Increase Faculty in Nursing Education Programs by Amending the Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program.