

Testimony from Charm Karunasiri in Support of LD 273
An Act to Continue the Doctors for Maine's Future Scholarship Program
February 23, 2020

Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, development, Economic Advancement and Business

Dear Senator Curry, Representative Roberts and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, development, Economic Advancement and Business. My name is Charm Karunasiri, and I am here to testify my support of the LD 273, An Act to Continue the Doctors for Maine's Future Scholarship Program.

I was born in Albany, NY and lived in Kandy, Sri Lanka for 10 years. My family and I moved to Los Angeles, CA in 2006 and moved to Caribou, ME in 2008. I graduated from Caribou High School in 2012. During this time, I became engrained in the Maine culture and came to call Caribou my home. I went on to complete my bachelor's degree in Biochemistry at the University of Maine. After graduation, I worked in a research laboratory at the National Institute of Health in Bethesda, MD. Given how much I missed Maine, I chose to return as a part of the Tufts Maine-Track Program.

Soon after I started my medical school career, Caleb Swanberg MD, a native of Caribou, began his career as a family medicine physician in Caribou. While I have never had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Swanberg, various members of my community have expressed the pride they feel in having a Caribou native return as physician. The American Academy of Family Physicians highlights that recruiting students from rural areas and preparing them, both medically and socially, to practice in a rural setting play an important role in retaining physicians in rural practices. [1] The Maine Track recruits students from Maine and provides education in rural health through the longitudinal integrated curriculum. Further, according to the Maine track website, 64% of the first graduating class of Maine-Track now practice in Maine. [2] While this addresses the issue of retaining physicians in Maine, the finances of medical school remain an obstacle that Mainers face when pursuing Medicine.

I am part of the first generation in my family to attend college and medical school in the United States. Our family comes from a country where education is fully subsidized, thus the concept of educational loans is a fairly new one. According to the AAMC, median loans for a graduating doctor is \$200,000. [3] I was unable to find average interests rates. The weighted average annual interest of my federal loans are 6.23% [4]. My principal is about \$218,000. Without the Doctors for Maine's Future Scholarship, my principal had the potential to be about a \$100,000 more. I am truly grateful to this scholarship. It ensured that my loans were manageable. Further it ensured that physician salaries played less of a role when deciding which specialty I wanted to pursue. It also empowered my classmates and I to know that the state of Maine has literally invested in us through this program. In a broader sense, scholarships such as these, highlights the devotion the state of Maine shows to the wellbeing of its citizens.

I am currently anxiously waiting the Residency Match to determine where the next step of my training will take me. I hope to train in Anesthesiology. I realized my passion for Anesthesiology

at Maine Medical Center, where I had the privilege to work with residents that were part of the Maine Track program. It is truly wonderful to be taught by fellow Mainers who understand the healthcare challenges faced by the citizens of Maine. I hope to practice in Maine as a physician in the future.

For these reasons, I urge the Committee to support LD 273. Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Charm Karunasiri
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[1] American Academy of Family Physicians, "Rural Practice, Keeping Physicians In (position Paper)", <https://www.aafp.org/about/policies/all/rural-practice-keeping-physicians.html>

[2] Maine Track MD, <https://medicine.tufts.edu/education/MD-maine-track>

[3] Association of American Medical Colleges, "Student Debt: Ensuring Medical School Remains Affordable", <https://students-residents.aamc.org/advocacy/article/student-debt/>

[4] I plan to federally consolidate my loans, thus why I provided the weighted average. Individual interest rates shown below. Calculations performed on Excel using the data below. Calculations according to the steps described in this website: <https://www.savingforcollege.com/article/how-to-calculate-the-weighted-average-interest-rate>

	Principal	Adjusted Rate
Stafford	185350	
2018	42,722	6
2019	44,944	6.6
2020	33,587	6.08
2020	8,000	6.08
2021	22,472	5.3

Grad Plus	33002	
2018	7,000	7
2018	11,008	7
2019	6,611	7.6
2021	2,500	5.3