

MaineHealth

MaineHealth Local Health Systems

Franklin Community
Health Network
LincolnHealth
MaineHealth Care At Home
Maine Behavioral Healthcare
Memorial Hospital
Maine Medical Center
Mid Coast-Parkview Health
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
New England Rehabilitation
Hospital of Portland
St. Mary's Health System

Testimony of Sarah Calder, MaineHealth In Support of Funding to Expand Maine Community College Nursing Education Programs Tuesday, March 1, 2022

Senator Breen, Representative Pierce and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations, I am Sarah Calder, Director of Government Affairs at MaineHealth. I am here today to testify in strong support of the funding included in the Governor's proposed Supplemental Budget that will allow the Maine Community College System to double its nursing education capacity at a time when the need has never been greater.

MaineHealth is a non-profit health care system that provides the full continuum of health care services to the residents of eleven counties in Maine and one in New Hampshire through its nine local health systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put tremendous pressure on every aspect of our health care system and has exacerbated a longstanding workforce crisis. We've long known that we were heading towards a retirement cliff, and that Maine would experience the national shortage of health care workers more acutely due to our rapidly aging population. And the pandemic has only exacerbated and accelerated this impending shortage.

Health care systems continue to grapple with the increased demand for services as our patients voluntarily put off care during the pandemic, or providers, like MaineHealth, have been forced to cancel and delay procedures due to COVID. In the period between November and January, Maine Medical Center, for example, delayed 2,138 cases. That pent-up demand means that we're now seeing more patients and more acutely ill patients than we ever have before. Our inpatient census has been at capacity nearly every day, a situation that rarely occurred before the pandemic.

MaineHealth has responded by adding almost 1,000 positions to accommodate the increased volume, but it hasn't been enough. Out of approximately 6,000 nursing positions at MaineHealth, over 860 are vacant – despite hiring over 900 external RNs last year (a 30% increase from the previous year).

In addition to investing over \$39 million last year to retain our current nurses, MaineHealth has also made significant investments in our recruitment efforts and to help “grow our own” in an effort to aggressively address this shortage. In fact, MaineHealth has partnered with all 15 nursing programs in the state to help our own employees grow in their careers. We have done so by supporting

entry level employees' enrollments in nursing programs and the progressive development of our nurses who wish to advance their careers by pursuing master's or doctoral degrees. We have also engaged in a variety of creative approaches with our academic partners in which we provide clinical instructors from among our expert RN staff and preserve their salaries and benefits at our own costs to allow for expanded enrollment capacity.

Despite this, over 1,500 individuals remain on the waitlist to enroll in the Maine Community College System's nursing programs. The Maine Hospital Association estimates that hospitals are currently recruiting for 1,500 to 2,000 nurses. Hospitals and the state's nursing programs have made inroads in addressing the shortage of nurses and the growing waitlist, but legislative action is needed if we're going to be successful. The demand for the nursing programs is clear, and thousands of good-paying, high quality nursing careers are waiting to be filled. The funding included in the Supplemental Budget proposal takes a big step towards starting to meet that need, and we sincerely thank Governor Mills.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.