

State of Maine | 131st Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business
Testimony of Hannah A. Hudson on behalf of Maine Primary Care Association
March 24, 2023

Supporting:
LD 648, “An Act to Address Staffing Shortages in Critical Public Safety Jobs Through Economic Incentives”

Sponsored by Senator Baldacci

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business, I am Hannah Hudson, Policy and Communications Manager at Maine Primary Care Association (MPCA).

MPCA is a membership organization that includes all of Maine's 20 Community Health Centers (CHCs), also known as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). Maine's CHCs make up the largest independent primary care network in the state, providing high quality and equitable primary and preventive medical, behavioral, and dental health services for over 200,000 people (1 in 6 Mainers) at more than 70 service delivery sites in all 16 Maine counties. They are at the forefront of delivering care to rural and underserved Maine communities.

Community Health Centers provide all patients with these comprehensive primary care services, as well as a host of other services that include transportation, translation, and case management. They are further required to provide this care *without regard to a patient's insurance status or ability to pay* - which is a mandate unlike any other primary care provider.

At the heart of each CHC is the staff that work every day to deliver innovative, high-quality care. Staff at both the clinical and non-clinical levels understand the communities they serve and are dedicated to ensuring health care access. However, there are longstanding challenges related to primary care recruitment and retention in Maine. Some commonly identified issues specific to attracting and retaining employees at Maine CHCs are increased retirements due to an aging workforce; increased competitive sign-on incentives and compensation; and lack of applicants (especially those prepared to work within a CHC setting).

CHCs have also had the experience of successfully recruiting a candidate, only to have that candidate decline the final offer due to a lack of affordable housing options. We believe that the provisions of this bill related to home mortgages are an innovative way to provide the incentives necessary to grow the primary care workforce in Maine.

Additionally, MPCA is supportive of the loan forgiveness provisions in this bill. These programs can be a valuable incentive for CHCs to utilize when recruiting providers as a strategy to address the exorbitant amount of debt they have acquired throughout their educational programming.

We encourage the committee to maintain a definition of “public health workers” in the final bill that includes Community Health Center workers to ensure that these critical organizations and their employees can be supported by this program.

On behalf of Maine’s Community Health Centers, thank you for considering our comments and we respectfully ask that you to support this bill. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly at hudson@mepca.org with any follow up questions.

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