



**Testimony of Nicki Larrabee, FNP**  
**Katahdin Valley Health Center**

**In Support of LD 1287: “An Act to Strengthen Efforts to Recruit and Retain Primary Care Professionals and Dentists in Rural and Underserved Areas of the State”**

**Monday, April 24, 2017**

Senator Dow, Representative Tipping and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation, my name is Nicki Larrabee and I am a Family Nurse Practitioner at Katahdin Valley Health Center (KVHC) in Patten. KVHC is a Community Health Center (CHC) that also provides high quality primary care to patients at sites in Island Falls, Houlton, Ashland, Brownville and Millinocket. I am sorry that I am unable to attend the Public Hearing today, but I am pleased to submit written testimony in strong support of LD 1287.

I was raised in Benedicta in Aroostook County until I graduated high school and went to college in Connecticut for nursing. I met my husband during my time as an undergraduate. He is from The County as well. We started talking about moving back home while I was still in college. However, I was accepted for a loan repayment program through the National Health Service Corps, which is a federal program designed to help with undergraduate loans for providers like me who serve in designated medically underserved communities-so I stayed to work out that obligation. Not long after, however, I started to feel the desire to further my education and went back to Quinnipiac for their Family Nurse Practitioner program.

My first baby was born during my graduate education, and we decided that it was time to move back to Maine. I wanted to provide healthcare to the people from my home area, and knew there was a great need in our region for clinicians. I interviewed at KVHC-which was considered a NHSC approved site for loan repayment. I signed my contract and accepted a significant cut in pay from what I was making as a registered nurse in Connecticut; as I fully expected to receive loan repayment for myself as well as my practice.

I was shocked when I received the letter from the NHSC saying that I was not accepted for an award. It was stressful for my family-- so much so that I thought about having to relocate to somewhere that I could get help with my student loans—as I have a significant amount of student loan debt. I didn't want to do this since I was finally back home near my family.

I spoke at the Maine Primary Care Association's Legislative Breakfast about these concerns back in 2014, and was so grateful that very soon after that, the Legislature passed the bill that created the Primary Care Professionals Tax Credit Program, which allows up to 5 physicians, nurse practitioners and physician assistants the ability to get state income tax credits for up to 5 years as long as they have outstanding student loans and commit to practice in a rural or medically underserved area.

I was fortunate to be awarded one of those limited slots, but because there are so few of them available, several of my colleagues across the state have been unsuccessful in getting approved for the program. Being able to receive these tax credits has allowed me to stay in the State and rural community that I love, and I urge you to extend and expand the program by voting in support of LD 1287. Access to healthcare for your fellow Mainers depends on it, as does the economy of rural Maine. Thank you.