Testimony of Sarah Calder, MaineHealth
Neither For Nor Against LD 129, “Resolve, To Direct the University of Maine System to Study the Feasibility of Establishing a Public Allopathic Medical School in Penobscot County”
Thursday, February 2, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I am Sarah Calder, Senior Government Affairs Director at MaineHealth, and I am here today to testify Neither For Nor Against LD 129, “Resolve, To Direct the University of Maine System to Study the Feasibility of Establishing a Public Allopathic Medical School in Penobscot County.”

I want to take the opportunity today to share with the Committee that, while Maine does not have a state-sponsored medical school, we do have two Maine-based medical school programs, including the Maine Track program, that are dedicated to addressing the shortage of physicians, particularly in rural Maine.

In 2008, Maine Medical Center (MMC) partnered with the Tufts University School of Medicine (TUSM) to start a program designed to serve Maine students close to home. At the time, Maine ranked 49th in the rate of residents who entered medical school. The TUSM-MMC Maine Track program, based on the highly successful program in Washington State, was founded with three goals in mind:

- To address the shortage of physicians in Maine, and particularly physicians in our rural areas;
- To make available access to high quality and affordable medical education for Maine’s best and brightest students; and
- To develop an innovative curriculum focused on rural medicine and community-based education to best meet the needs of our state.

The unique MMC-TUSM partnership offers a rigorous training program that exposes students to rural clinical practice from day one and provides students firsthand experience providing care in local communities throughout the state including such towns as Madison, Caribou, Belfast, Wiscasset, Richmond, and Norway. Most importantly, in an effort to ensure that Maine students have access to medical education at a cost on par with that of a state school, Maine Medical Center guarantees that at least 20 Maine students in each class receive scholarships of $25,000 per year, totaling more than $2 million each year. The scholarships have been raised through the generosity of private donors, local companies, and, very importantly, the Doctors for Maine’s Future scholarship program, which was created by the 124th Maine Legislature and, more recently, received a
$2 million investment in the Maine Jobs & Recovery Plan passed by the 130th Legislature.

Additionally, the program is accessible. We are very proud to offer a Maine Track Early Assurance Program for sophomores at Bates College, Bowdoin College, Colby College, and all University of Maine campuses. Additionally, The MMC-TUSM acceptance rate last year for Mainers into the Maine Track was 47%. For those from away, our acceptance rate was only 17%. This compares very favorably to TUSM’s overall acceptance rate of approximately 4% and the average national acceptance rate of approximately 5.5%.

It is clear that our student selection process, curriculum, and scholarship opportunities are critically important in producing local physicians:

- The number of medical school applications from Maine residents has almost tripled since the program began in 2009.
- From the 10 classes of Maine Track alumni to date, 64 (or 45%) are now practicing in Maine (while others continue postgraduate training or are serving in the military).
- The Maine Track Class of 2026 includes 40 students—24 of these students grew up in Maine.
- To date, 362 physicians over 10 classes have graduated from the Maine Track Program. 233 were from Maine.

One last point I would like to raise is that states’ residency slots have been limited by funding to support graduate medical education from the Federal government. MaineHealth has been able to increase the number of resident and fellowship positions through our own resources, recognizing this as a solution to our physician workforce needs. Given this limitation, we work collaboratively with the UNE’s College of Osteopathic Medicine and the Maine Track program to ensure that Maine-trained students have priority access to the limited number of residency slots available. This is important because according to the Association of American Medical Colleges’ 2022 Report on Residents, more than half (55.2%) of the individuals who completed residency training from 2012 to 2021 are practicing in the state where they did their residency training. According to this same report, Maine has the 14th highest retention rate of residents in the nation.

The outcomes of the Maine Track and UNE College of Osteopathic Medicine programs – practicing in primary care, practicing in a rural community, and practicing in an underserved area – are critical as we look to grow and maintain access to care for your constituents throughout Maine.

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