Testimony of Sarah Calder, MaineHealth 
In Support of LD 937, “Resolve, to Establish the Commission Regarding Foreign-trained Physicians Living in Maine”
Tuesday, March 21, 2023

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services, I am Sarah Calder, Senior Government Affairs Director at MaineHealth, and I am here to testify in support of LD 937, “Resolve, to Establish the Commission Regarding Foreign-trained Physicians Living in Maine.”

MaineHealth is an integrated 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. MaineHealth is also the state’s largest private employer with over 22,000 care team members, but, we are facing a workforce crisis that is significantly impacting access to care. We are currently recruiting for over 2,900 positions, in addition to over 55 physicians and 70 advanced practice providers. Unfortunately, even if we filled these provider positions, it would only partially improve patient access as the volume of patients continues to increase at the same time as more and more clinicians, in Maine and nationally, cut back their clinical hours or simply leave the profession.

In an effort to address the crisis, we have invested heavily in retaining our current workforce, but also in creative and innovative solutions to “grow our own,” including developing entry level employees in front line positions from Environmental Services to training tomorrow’s physicians. For example, through our MaineHealth Center for Workforce Development, we partner with the Immigrant Welcome Center of Greater Portland to offer English language acquisition classes to Maine Medical Center (MMC) employees. The pilot began in January 2019, using a computer-based digital language lab with customized content tailored for MaineHealth and MMC – that then is translated into any language, and builds on the employee’s current knowledge of the English language. We support employees in this class with their learning, career navigation, awareness, and wraparound supports by collaborating with local partners.

MaineHealth recognizes the contribution our immigrant care team members make every day and we are committed to helping them grow within their careers. Many of them have higher education degrees from
other countries – including medical degrees – and as their English language skills improve we provide guidance into other internal and external career pathway and training opportunities. But the barriers (at the state and federal levels) to fully integrating into the health care workforce – at the same skill and level they were trained in – are significant.

In preparation for this hearing, I had the pleasure of speaking with one of our residents yesterday. He graduated from medical school in Lebanon in 2016. After graduating, he completed 4 years of residency in internal medicine and infectious disease. For the fifth and final year of his infectious disease fellowship, he needed to apply to another country and was accepted at Maine Medical Center. Unfortunately, after completing a two-year infectious disease fellowship, he was not able to sit for his Boards. In order to do so, he has to complete a SECOND three-year internal medicine residency. When he’s done, he’d like to stay in Maine to practice as infectious disease physician.

Prior to the pandemic, MaineHealth served on the Working Group to Study Barriers to Credentialing (formed by Resolve 2019, Ch. 79). The Working Group was charged with identifying barriers and recommendations to enable foreign-credentialed and foreign-skilled individuals and out-of-state license holders to become part of Maine’s workforce and economy, but, importantly, the focus was on professional licensing entities administered by the Office of Professional and Occupational Regulation. It did not include licensing boards affiliated with the Department, like the Board of Medicine.

The legislation before you today is the critical next step to continue the conversation started by the Working Group, but with the focus solely on foreign-trained physicians. We strongly urge your support and look forward to working with the Commission to ensure new Mainers are able to integrate into the health care workforce using their education and experience from another country.

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