

MaineHealth

Testimony of Sarah Calder, MaineHealth In Opposition to LD 1582

“An Act Relating to Surgical Technologists and the Practice of Surgical Technology”

May 2, 2019

MaineHealth Member Organizations:

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

Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services, I am Sarah Calder, Director of Government Affairs at MaineHealth, and I am here to testify in opposition to LD 1582, “An Act Relating to Surgical Technologists and the Practice of Surgical Technology.”

A surgical technologist works closely with the surgeon, anesthesiologist, registered nurse, and licensed practical nurse to deliver direct patient care before, during, and after surgery. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 12,600 surgical technologists will be needed by 2026.

To address the growing shortage of surgical technologists, MaineHealth has made significant investments to help “grow our own” through the Maine Medical Center (MMC) School of Surgical Technology. Established in 1969, the school is fully accredited by the Joint Commission and the Commission on Accreditation of Allied Health Programs (CAAHEP), and offers a one-year, full-time program divided into two six-month semesters. First semester classes are held at Southern Maine Community College (SMCC) and include basic sciences, care and safety of the patient, and principles of operating room technique. The second semester is primarily held at MMC, enabling the student to gain practical experience in the operating room. Second semester students also participate in clinical rotations at several ambulatory surgery sites to maximize their clinical experiences. Upon completion of the MMC surgical technology program, students can also apply to the SMCC associate degree program for a second year of study.

The Maine Medical Center School of Surgical Technology graduates two classes of up to 16 students per class each year and is the largest resource for surgical technologists in the state. The certification pass rate for MMC graduates has consistently exceeded the national benchmark and during the 2017/2018 examination review cycle, 91% of MMC graduates passed certification boards.

Despite the Maine Medical Center School of Surgical Technology, MaineHealth’s local health systems continue to struggle to hire surgical technologists. Given the hiring difficulties, our health systems often hire non-certified surgical technicians with the commitment that the individual will become certified within one year. With that said, MaineHealth has significant concerns with the requirement

included in LD 1582 to complete certification within six months. The certification restriction included in the legislation before you today could result in even more unfilled surgical technologist positions within the system.

We also believe that this legislation would allow for only one credentialing certification – the Certified Surgical Technologist (CST) credential, which is only granted by the National Board of Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting (NBSTSA) and affiliated with the Association of Surgical Technologists (AST) – as a condition of employment:

2. Employment. A health care facility may not employ or otherwise contract for the services of a surgical technologist unless the surgical technologist:

A. Has successfully completed a nationally accredited surgical technology education program and has and maintains a **certified surgical technologist credential** administered by a nationally accredited surgical technologist credentialing organization; or

This limitation is concerning given that MaineHealth also hires individuals, including veterans, certified through the National Center for Competency Testing (NCCT). Also, the fees associated with the CST/NBSTSA certification are far higher than those associated with the NCCT certification.

Additionally, while we appreciate the legislation's acknowledgement that these changes would be more difficult for a critical access hospital to adopt, we have significant concerns that the requirements are still quite onerous. For example, LD 1582 states that a critical access hospital needs to make every effort to employ surgical technologists who are certified, but may employ a non-certified surgical technologist only if the hospital conducts exhaustive and verifiable recruitment efforts (must maintain documentation of recruitment efforts). Will our already struggling critical access hospitals need to go above and beyond their current recruitment efforts to meet the requirements of this legislation? I also want to be clear that this carve-out is only for critical access hospitals – many of our state's rural hospitals that are at risk of closing are not designated as critical access hospitals.

Finally, the Accreditation Review Council on Education in Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting (ARC/STSA) approved at its March 2019 Board meeting that in order for a program to be accredited by the CAAHEP it must provide an Associate Degree or higher to program students by August 1, 2021 – or seek a one-time extension of up to two years. This proposal will now be reviewed by the AST and the American College of Surgeons (ACS). If this proposal is approved,

the Maine Medical Center School of Surgical Technology program would no longer be accredited. With that said, passage of LD 1582 combined with this accreditation change would result in the graduates of the Maine Medical Center School of Surgical Technology being unemployable (except at critical access hospitals) in the State of Maine.

For those reasons, I urge the Committee to vote Ought Not to Pass LD 1582, "An Act Relating to Surgical Technologists and the Practice of Surgical Technology." Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.