

**Floor Statement on the Geriatrics Workforce Improvement Act  
Senator Susan M. Collins**

**January 31, 2019**

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Mr. President, I rise today to introduce legislation, with my colleague Senator Casey, that would reauthorize the only federally funded programs specifically designed to develop a health provider workforce to care for our older Americans. The Geriatrics Workforce Improvement Act would reauthorize the Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program and also reinstate the Geriatric Academic Career Awards program.

The number of Americans aged 65 and older is growing rapidly. In my state of Maine, we are reaching an aging milestone faster than other states – by 2020, the number of Maine seniors is projected to exceed the number of Maine children. This is 15 years ahead of the national projected date of 2035, at which point the number of Americans aged 65 and older will outnumber those under age 18 for the first time in our nation’s history.

The United States is facing a critical shortage of geriatric health professionals and direct service workers to support our aging population. Today, we need 20,000 geriatricians; however, fewer than 7,300 of our nation’s nearly one million physicians are board-certified as geriatricians. By 2030, we will need 30,000 geriatricians and even more geriatric health professionals and direct service workers. To achieve this goal, we will need to train 1,600 geriatric specialists per year over the next 12 years.

For the state of Maine, with an aging population of more than a quarter million Mainers over the age of 65, and only 40 geriatricians, there is an acute need to quickly train more geriatric health professionals and direct service workers to meet the growing demand. The University of New England College of Osteopathic Medicine has joined the University of Maine this year in proposing the “Aging Maine Transformation Collaborative” (AgingME). I was pleased to lend my support to this collaboration earlier this year. If funded, AgingME would become our state’s first Geriatrics Workforce Enhancement Program, bringing with it, much needed assistance to communities and families throughout our state.

Nationwide, our bill would reauthorize this workforce enhancement program at \$45 million per year over the next five years, and reinstate the geriatric academic career awards program at \$6 million per year. Together, these programs would train the current workforce and family caregivers, while simultaneously developing a cadre of emerging leaders in geriatric education, in a variety of disciplines. By doing both, we will ensure that older Americans will be cared for by a health care workforce specifically trained to meet their unique and complex health care challenges for decades to come. This training to use the most efficient and effective methods for older adults will result in improved care while reducing unnecessary costs.

I'm pleased to say that our legislation is supported by the leading organizations in gerontology and geriatrics, including the Eldercare Workforce Alliance, the American Geriatrics Society, the Alzheimer's Impact Movement, and the National Association of Geriatric Education Centers. I would ask unanimous consent to enter these letters of support into the record.

Mr. President, I urge all of my colleagues to support this bipartisan legislation that would ensure geriatric education for our current workforce, while optimizing resources to bolster academic careers in geriatrics, helping to attract the best and the brightest into this field. Together, these programs would develop exactly the kind of highly qualified workforce that we need to care for Americans as our nation grows older.

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