

Senator Goodall, Representative Berry and members of the Joint Select Committee on Maine's Workforce and Economic Future my name is Isaac Stone and I live in Winslow, Maine with my wife and two children. Back in 2007 I was working in direct care at a group home earning just under \$10 per hour. Today I'm employed as an RN and earning \$55,000 per year thanks to the Competitive Skills Scholarship Program. My family has private insurance through my employer and we no longer have to rely on public assistance benefits to get by.

The Competitive Skills Scholarship Program was a Godsend for me. I really don't believe I would have been able to attend school without the help I received. With my past work I was just about able to pay our bills, but never get ahead. It was a leap of faith for me to go on to the Community College, but one I needed to take for myself and my family. This program made it possible for me to succeed.

Being a student, especially in a highly technical program like nursing, is stressful. Add to that a beautiful newborn baby daughter with Down's syndrome, and you get an idea of what life was like. Though it was a tough few years, it scares me to think where I and my family would be today without CSSP.

The benefits we received from CSSP helped us cover our monthly expenses. When my car wouldn't pass inspection CSSP helped me with car repairs. As you can imagine, the cost of books in the nursing program are extremely high and I never had enough money left over from my financial aid to cover them so again, CSSP came to the rescue.

I wouldn't be a nurse today if it wasn't for CSSP. I work with many CNAs who have families and I wonder how they get by on their \$8 per hour—many of them simply cannot. I have no doubt that many of them receive varying forms of public assistance and I wish that the CSSP program had enough funding to enable them to take advantage of the program. I have no doubt that many would. And ultimately isn't that what we want as a state - to help people get the training they need so that they can earn a good wage and no longer have to rely on public assistance?

At some point I may continue on for a Bachelor's Degree in nursing. However, I earn enough money now so that I can do that on my own, while continuing to work. I will always be grateful that the State of Maine was wise enough to create the CSSP program and I am happy to know that some of my tax dollars go to support this great program. I know you have difficult decisions to make about the many demands on the public's money, but I think if you look beyond today and into the future you'll see how programs like CSSP are short term investments that provide long term benefits.