STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

TESTIMONY PRESENTED BEFORE THE PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
February 21, 2007

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Senate Bill 263 - An Act Concerning a Loan Forgiveness Program for Historically Underrepresented Students Pursuing Careers in the Health Profession

House Bill 6694 - An Act Increasing Funding For Health Care Professionals Under the Loan Repayment Program

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The Department of Public Health provides the following information with regard to Senate Bill 263 and House Bill 6694.

This proposed legislation would increase access to primary care in medically underserved areas. The Department of Public Health currently administers a Student Loan Repayment Program (SLRP), which was established in 1990 as a matching fund for federal resources provided by the Health Resources System Administration (HRSA) agency. The program was established as a strategy to improve access to quality care and eliminate workforce shortages in underserved areas. Participants in the program are primary care clinicians who typically work for Community Health Centers and other primary care sites such as School Based Health Clinics.

The SLRP provides financial incentives to primary care providers to practice in underserved areas, which generally offer non-competitive compensation and less than ideal working conditions. The incentive is in the form of a repayment of student loans. Awards are currently capped to $30,000 and given in exchange of a period for two consecutive years of service. Under this program, the state has been securing the provision of primary care services by an average of 20 to 25 clinicians per year. Since the program inception, over 80 clinicians have practiced or continue practicing in underserved areas in the state.

Administration of the SLRP is a relatively complex effort that requires multiple contracts with different timeframes and payment schedules. Extensive staff efforts are required in order to recruit and retain health professionals who are willing to practice in community based settings.

Thank you for your consideration of the Department's views on this bill.

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