

Public Health Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-96

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A WORKING GROUP TO ENHANCE PHYSICIAN

Title: RECRUITMENT IN THE STATE.

Vote Date: 3/1/2019

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/25/2019

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Public Health Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill would create a task force of fourteen members to study the recruitment and retention methods to encourage primary care physicians to remain in Connecticut. The group is required to submit its findings to the public health commissioner by January 1, 2021. The focus of the group would be six critical areas:

1. Recruitment, retention, and compensation of behavioral, psychiatric, and primary care physicians
2. The benefits of a loan forgiveness program
3. Availability of physicians
4. The impact of health insurance on care accessibility
5. Potential obstacles to a physician's involvement in various networks
6. Aid for graduate medical education

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Department of Public Health: DPH supports the proposed legislation. The DPH Primary Care Office (PCO), in conjunction with the Health Resources and Services Administration, studies health care accessibility in underserved regions and actively works to recruit physicians representing a number of different fields. Once data has been collected, the PCO notifies both federal and state workforce assistance programs in the hopes that they will contribute to their healthcare network. The National Health Service Corps (NHSC), managed by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, is one example of a program that works to fulfill the goal of recruitment and retention. Through a number of benefits, including loan repayment, medical students are recruited to work in communities

with limited access to healthcare. Given the PCO's program as well as the prospective organizations outlined in the bill, the Department supports this legislation. However, the Department would like to address the language in subsection (b) to confirm that it supports the goals of both the committee and the Department.

Connecticut Office of Healthcare Strategy (OHS): The OHS supports this proposed bill. Without working to improve the provider network in the state, the intentions of the Affordable Care Act will suffer and furthermore, the state's modernization process will be delayed. The OHS believes this legislation will "expand primary care provider teams, improve consumer experience, and facilitate better outcomes for population health." The next decade is expecting a shortage of primary care physicians. The workforce in Connecticut will be negatively impacted if incentives continue to decline for primary care physicians. The testimony also highlighted the current racial disparity in the delivery of healthcare in our state. OHS offered potential suggestions to the system, including the expansion of services to encompass transportation and housing.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Connecticut Hospital Association: Physician recruitment and retention is key for the state's hospitals. In enacting this proposed legislation, a foundation would be established to discuss the best methods of recruitment and retention in Connecticut.

MacDara Tynan, MD, MBA, Connecticut Children's Medical Center (CCMC): Connecticut Children's Medical Center supports the bill but requests that a pediatric expert is included in the panel, as children and adolescents have very specific medical needs that are not necessarily aligned with those of an older population. Connecticut Children's Care Network is an example of an organization that currently offers pediatric care to state residents and provides support to pediatricians across the state. The Network has seen the recruitment and retention issue firsthand and believes it is a direct result of debt incurred by medical students. The CCMC and the Connecticut Children's Care Network have been working to improve the quality and cost of healthcare, as well as working to retain physicians across the state.

Deb Polun, Senior Director for Policy and Outreach, Community Health Center Association of Connecticut: CHCACT supports the bill with a few suggestions. Annually, CHCACT surveys health center leaders in Connecticut to determine their requests and goals. According to the testimony, the past few years have consistently shown that the number one problem is provider recruitment. It is apparent that there is a challenge to expanding the availability of healthcare services. In addition to the National Health Service Corps referenced above, forty-two states offer a State Loan Repayment Program for physicians who opt to work in limited access areas. This program was offered in the state of Connecticut until 2009. Reinstating the program at a cost of \$125,000 annually, which would be matched by federal funds, would allow the state to stay competitive in recruitment and retention.

Dr. Scott Walters, CT Dermatology and Dermatologic Surgery Society et al.: Physicians and the healthcare system play a large role in supporting the economy of the state. Currently, over a third of the state's physician population is over the age of sixty. Many of these physicians are choosing to retire early or opting to leave the state, while young doctors are choosing not to come to Connecticut. With the impending national physician shortage anticipated within the next six years, this trend may project an even greater shortage in

Connecticut. There are three medical schools in the state that award degrees to hundreds of new physicians annually; however, a number of these students choose to leave the state following graduation. This can be attributed to a lack of support and assistance for new physicians, high medical liability insurance rates, rigid Certificate of Need laws, a “highly concentrated health insurance market,” and the alleged undervaluing of medicine. In order to encourage new physicians to come to the state, the above issues must be studied.

Connecticut State Medical Society (CMS): Physicians are significant contributors to Connecticut’s economy, with over 50,000 jobs supported by physicians and over \$24 billion produced via the physician industry. With a disparate age gap among physicians in the state and a low retention rate among physicians who graduate from state programs, it is important to look into the issues plaguing the industry. These issues, outlined in previous testimony, include a lack of incentives, liability costs, and industry taxes. By establishing a working group, these issues can be explored and hopefully improve the retention rate.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None submitted.

Reported by: Meagan Schantz

Date: 3/7/19