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## **OLR Bill Analysis**

### **sSB 1087**

#### ***AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS IN THE STATE.***

#### **SUMMARY**

This bill requires, rather than allows, the Department of Public Health (DPH) to establish a program providing three-year grants to community-based primary care providers, within available appropriations, to expand access to care for the uninsured (currently, the program is not funded). DPH must do so by January 1, 2022. Among other things, this program may provide loan repayment to eligible primary care clinicians and registered nurses (RNs). The bill expands the types of eligible clinicians to include mental health care providers, among others.

The bill also requires DPH, by January 1, 2022, to establish a five-year pilot program to recruit and retain mental health providers at federally qualified health centers (FQHCs, see BACKGROUND), including psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychiatric advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs).

Additionally, the bill requires the Office of Higher Education (OHE), within available appropriations, to administer a loan reimbursement grant program for psychiatrists, psychologists, and psychiatric APRNs who are employed at an FQHC for at least two years. Under the program, eligible participants may receive student loan reimbursement grants of up to \$25,000 a year for up to two years.

**EFFECTIVE DATE:** July 1, 2021, except the pilot program takes effect upon passage.

#### **§ 1 — PRIMARY CARE DIRECT SERVICES PROGRAM**

Under this program, DPH may award three-year grants to community-based providers of primary care services to expand access

to care for the uninsured. Among other things, the grants may fund salary subsidies or loan repayment for primary care clinicians and RNs who meet program requirements. The bill requires the commissioner to establish the program, rather than allowing her to as under current law, but retains the current condition that the program operate within available appropriations.

The bill adds alcohol and drug counselors, pharmacists, and mental health care providers to the list of primary care clinicians eligible for the program subsidies or loan repayment. The bill also specifies that RNs are classified as primary care clinicians under the program, but as noted above, they are already eligible for the program under current law.

Under existing law, the following providers are also classified as primary care clinicians and thus eligible for the program when funded: family practice and internal medicine physicians, general practice osteopaths, obstetricians, gynecologists, pediatricians, dentists, certified nurse midwives, APRNs, physician assistants, and dental hygienists.

By law, individuals receiving salary subsidies or loan repayment under the program must (1) provide services to the uninsured on a sliding-scale basis, provide free care if necessary, accept Medicare assignment, and participate in Medicaid or (2) provide nursing services in school-based health centers and expanded school health sites.

## **§ 2 — FQHC PILOT PROGRAM**

The bill requires DPH, by January 1, 2022, to establish a five-year pilot program to recruit and retain mental health care providers at FQHCs. This includes, at a minimum, psychiatrists, psychologists, and APRNs board-certified as psychiatric mental health providers by the American Nurses Credentialing Center.

Under the bill, the DPH commissioner must (1) prescribe how FQHCs may apply to participate, (2) establish the selection criteria,

and (3) explore funding the program through public-private partnerships, grant programs, federal funds, and state funds. The program's selection criteria must prioritize the placement of mental health care providers in parts of the state where (1) there is the greatest need for them, (2) there are economically distressed municipalities, and (3) residents lack access to this care near their homes.

Starting by January 1, 2023, and until 2027, the bill requires the commissioner to annually report on the program to the Public Health Committee. The reports must evaluate the program's operation and effectiveness.

### **§ 3 — MENTAL HEALTH CARE PROVIDER STUDENT LOAN REIMBURSEMENT PROGRAM**

Beginning in FY 21 and each fiscal year thereafter, the bill requires OHE to administer a mental health care provider student loan reimbursement grant program, within available appropriations.

The program is for psychiatrists, psychologists, and board-certified psychiatric APRNs as specified above. To qualify, they must be employed as mental health care providers by an in-state FQHC for at least two years.

Eligible individuals may receive grants for up to \$25,000 per year, for up to two years, for reimbursement of federal or state educational loans. They may only be reimbursed for loan payments they made while employed by an FQHC. The OHE executive director prescribes when and how to apply to the program.

Under the bill, any unexpended funds appropriated for the program do not lapse at the end of the fiscal year and are available for expenditure in the next fiscal year. The bill allows OHE to accept gifts, grants, and donations from any source, public or private, for the program.

### **BACKGROUND**

#### ***Federally Qualified Health Centers***

Under federal law, FQHCs generally are community-based

nonprofit or public organizations that qualify for or receive grants under Section 330 of the Public Health Services Act. To receive federal funding, they must provide required primary health care services to medically underserved populations or certain other populations (42 U.S.C. §§ 1396d(1)(2)(B) and -254b).

***Related Bills***

sSB 1 (File 481, § 35), favorably reported by the Public Health Committee, makes a \$500,000 General Fund appropriation to DPH in FY 22 to provide three-year grants to community-based health care providers in primary care settings.

sHB 6235 (File 336), favorably reported by the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee, establishes a program to offer eligible psychiatrists the option of segregating a portion of their state income tax payments into a special fund used for making a down payment to purchase their first home.

**COMMITTEE ACTION**

Public Health Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 33 Nay 0 (03/31/2021)