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Agency of Human Services
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Jenney Samuelson, *Secretary*
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Date: February 7, 2024

To: Chair Michael Marcotte and Chair Lori Houghton

From: Wendy Trafton, Deputy Director of Health Care Reform

Re: Responses to questions raised during the January 26th, 2024, Joint Hearing between the House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development and House Committee on Health Care

Overview: The Agency of Human Services (AHS) received a January 26th testimony request from the House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development and House Committee on Health Care. The Deputy Director of Health Care Reform was unable to respond to committee questions due to connectivity issues during travel from an out of state meeting. Comments were made about the timeliness of establishing Agency of Human Services Central Office grants and lack of performance analysis. This memo provides information to the Committees related to these topics. Appendix A and B include further information on the program requirements in each grant agreement and applicable Act 183 of 2022 sections.

Response to comment about timeliness:

Further information about the process for establishing grants for loan repayment and tuition assistance for mental health and substance use disorder treatment professionals is available in the [March 1, 2023 report](#) issued by the AHS. Delays in reporting data to the AHS impacted the timeliness of calculating equitable distributions to the designated and specialized service agencies which impacted the grant execution dates.

Stakeholder groups were convened to assess community impact and ability to provide the educational support required by the legislation as well as to provide input into the development of the Nurse Preceptor and Nursing Pipeline and Apprenticeship Program application process. AHS also hired a contractor to assist in the development of these grant programs.

The funding source appropriated in Act 183 of 2022 for the Nurse Preceptor and Nursing Pipeline and Apprenticeship Programs would not have permitted the AHS to develop grant programs that met legislative intent. The Nurse Preceptor Program would have been limited to payments for preceptor work performed during the COVID-19 public health emergency which

ended on April 10, 2023. The Nursing Pipeline and Apprenticeship Programs would have been limited in their ability to cover trainees living costs while attending the program. The AHS heard significant stakeholder feedback that covering these costs was essential for supporting staff such as personal care attendants and licensed nursing assistants to become higher-level nursing professionals. The AHS submitted a Budget Adjustment Act request, 2023 Act 3, to utilize remaining funds from the Workforce Recruitment and Retention Program for these two programs. This additional funding in conjunction with the Agency of Administration's approval to use the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Funds under the Revenue Replacement category in April 2023 provided sufficient flexibility to support the intended scope of the two grant programs. The AHS worked with the Agency of Administration and its contractor to secure approval for use of these funds and released program guidance and applications for both programs in May and June 2023.

Response to comment about performance analysis:

Applications for both programs delineated the eligibility and award priority criteria stated in Act 183. Applications were evaluated, scored, and awarded according to the legislatively mandated criteria. Preliminary grant award notices subsequently provided AHS and potential awardees with an additional opportunity to clarify the grantees' adherence to the goals and priorities of the program.

Final grant award documents spelled out the program requirements, deliverables, and performance measures that grantees need to fulfill. Reporting requirements and performance measures are contained in Appendix A.

Technical assistance and supervision for the Nurse Preceptor and Nursing Pipeline and Apprenticeship Programs grants is provided by the Health Care Workforce Director.

Appendix A

Grant Requirements for ACT 183 AHS Nurse Preceptor, Nursing Pipeline and Apprenticeship, and Designated and Specialized Services Agencies Workforce Development Grant Programs

Nurse Preceptor Program Reporting Requirements

Program Reports

The Program Report must include, at a minimum:

- The total number of Eligible Employees who received Incentive Payments for preceptor supervision for nursing students enrolled in Vermont nursing schools during the previous July 1 – June 30 grant period, broken down as follows:
 - Total number of Eligible Employees who already provided preceptor supervision for nursing students enrolled in Vermont nursing schools prior to the grant award who received Incentive Payments during the previous July 1 – June 30 grant period
 - Total number of Eligible Employees (inclusive of incumbent employees and new hires) who did not provide preceptor supervision for nursing students enrolled in Vermont nursing schools prior to the grant award who received Incentive Payments during the previous July 1 – June 30 grant period
- The total number of hours of preceptor supervision for nursing students enrolled in Vermont nursing schools supported by the grant award during the July 1 – June 30 grant period.
- The total amount of Incentive Payments supported by the grant award disbursed to Eligible Employees during the July 1 – June 30 grant period.
- The total amount of Incentive Payments supported by Grantee matching funds disbursed to Eligible Employees during the July 1 – June 30 grant period.

The Program Report must also provide a brief narrative response to the following questions:

- What was the most significant benefit your organization or its employees gained from this grant award during the July 1 – June 30 grant period?
- What was the biggest obstacle to implementing and sustaining preceptor supervision for student nurses encountered by your organization during the July 1 – June 30 grant period?
- If either the number of Eligible Employees to provide preceptor supervision or number of preceptor hours to be provided identified in the grant application was not achieved during the July 1 – June 30 grant period, what was the reason?

Performance Measures

The Grantee shall make best efforts to achieve high performance as follows:

- 95% of the number of Eligible Employees identified in the application as potential recipients of Incentive Payments provide preceptor supervision for student nurses.

- 95% of the number hours of preceptor supervision for student nurses to be provided during a twelve-month period identified in the application are completed.

Nursing Apprenticeship and Pipeline Program Reporting Requirements

Program Reports

Annual Program and Program End Reports must include, at a minimum:

- Number of Staff Participants enrolled in the nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program during the reporting period plus the following details for each Staff Participant:
 - Employer (for Grantees comprised of two or more partner agencies)
 - Job title
 - Certificate or degree program in which the Staff Participant is enrolled
- Number of Staff Participants who completed a nursing certificate or degree program during the reporting period, including the type of certificate or degree program completed by each Staff Participant.
- Number of Staff Participants who transitioned to a new role following completion of a nursing certificate or degree program during the reporting period, The job title of each Staff Participant's previous and newly attained role.
- Total dollar amount of payments made for tuition, fees, and required books and supplies made on behalf of Staff Participants during the reporting period including Grants Program funds and any matching funds, if applicable
- Total dollar amount of scholarships and grants attained by Staff Participants during the reporting period.
- Total dollar amount of payments for living expenses made to Staff Participants during the reporting period including Grants Program funds and any matching funds, if applicable.

Annual Program Reports and the Program End Report must also include a brief narrative response to the following questions:

- What was the most significant benefit your organization and any partners gained from this Grant award during the reporting period?
- What was the biggest obstacle encountered during the reporting period with regards to 1) successfully implementing the nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program, and 2) supporting the success and persistence of Staff Participants?
- In what ways did your organization leverage the nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program to help advance the professional development of employees from marginalized communities during the reporting period? Did your organization undertake any activities outside of the program to help advance the professional development of employees from marginalized communities during the reporting period? Please briefly describe.
- Did your organization make any significant progress with regards to planning for the sustainability of the nursing apprenticeship or pipeline program post-Grant award? If so, please briefly describe this progress.

- If any milestones were not achieved during the reporting period, what was the reason?

Performance Measures

The Grantee shall provide supports to Staff Participants to make best efforts to achieve high performance as follows:

- 90% of Staff Participants attain a certificate or degree that qualifies them to become a higher-level nursing professional on or before December 31, 2026
- 85% of Staff Participants move into a higher-level nursing role on or before December 31, 2026

Designated and Specialized Services Agencies Workforce Development Program Reporting Requirements

Program Reports

Midpoint and End of Program Reports must include, at a minimum:

- The categories of the employees at the agency ranked by number of vacant positions;
- The breakdown of Forgivable Loans by ranked categories of employees and Forgivable Loan type (e.g. tuition assistance or loan repayment), the acceptance rate of applications by category of employees and Forgivable Loan type, and the change in vacancies in those categories over the reporting period;
- Number of Forgivable Loans executed to date, total amount of funds awarded and a breakdown of the programs within which the Eligible Individuals who receive Forgivable Loans will deliver services;
- The specific degrees or certificates toward which Eligible Individuals who receive Forgivable Loans in the form of Tuition Assistance are working and those earned by Eligible Individuals who receive Forgivable Loans in the form of Loan Repayment;
- The number of new employees attracted to the Grantee as a result of the Forgivable Loan opportunity, their fields of study, and the programs in which they deliver services;
- The number of Eligible Individuals who receive Forgivable Loans that have completed their coursework that was funded through Tuition Assistance and percent of those Eligible Individuals who receive Forgivable Loans that was funded through Tuition Assistance who completed their coursework in good standing;
- The number and percent of Eligible Individuals who receive Forgivable Loans that have completed their service obligation;
- The number and percent of Eligible Individuals who receive Forgivable Loans that did not complete their service obligation as expected; and
- The number and total amount of required repayments, repayment amounts collected to date, repayment amounts that are outstanding, and repayment amounts that are overdue.

Performance Measures

The Grantee shall provide supports to Eligible Individuals to make best efforts to achieve high performance as follows:

- 90% of Eligible Individuals receiving Forgivable Loans are in compliance with their service obligation.
- 90% of Eligible Individuals receiving Forgivable Loans in the form of Tuition Assistance complete coursework in good standing.

Appendix B

The Designated and Specialized Services Agencies Workforce Development Program, Nurse Preceptor Program and the Nursing Pipeline and Apprenticeship Program were developed following legislative intent outlined in ACT 183 Secs. 21,22 and 29:

“The Agency shall distribute the funds to critical access hospitals employing nurses who provide student preceptor supervision based on the number of preceptor hours to be provided, at a rate of \$5.00 per preceptor hour, or a lesser hourly rate if the need exceeds the available funds. The Agency shall prioritize funding for hospitals that provide matching funds for additional preceptor compensation or that commit to providing future compensation and support to expanding the number of preceptors.”

“In fiscal year 2023, the amount of \$2,500,000.00 is appropriated from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) – Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Funds to the Agency of Human Services and shall carry forward for the purpose of providing grants to health care employers, including hospitals, long-term care facilities, designated and specialized service agencies, federally qualified health centers, and other health care providers, to establish or expand partnerships with Vermont nursing schools to create nursing pipeline or apprenticeship programs, or both, that will train members of the health care employers’ existing staff, including personal care attendants, licensed nursing assistants, and licensed practical nurses, to become higher-level nursing professionals.

Through a combination of scholarship awards, grants awarded to health care employers pursuant to this section, and the health care employer’s contributions, the trainees’ tuition and fees shall be covered in full, and trainees shall be provided with assistance in meeting their living costs, such as housing and child care, while attending the program.

(b) In awarding grants pursuant to this section, the Agency of Human Services shall give priority to health care employer proposals based on the following criteria:

- 1) the extent to which the health care employer proposes to participate financially in the program;
- (2) the extent of the health care employer’s commitment to sustaining the program financially, including providing financial support for nurse preceptors, to create ongoing opportunities for educational advancement in nursing;
- (3) the ability of the health care employer’s staff to leverage nursing scholarship opportunities to maximize the reach of the grant funds;
- (4) the employer’s demonstrated ability to retain nursing students in the Vermont nursing workforce;
- (5) the employer’s geographic location, in order to ensure access to pipeline and apprenticeship programs for nursing staff across Vermont; and

(6) the employer’s commitment to advancing the professional development of individuals from marginalized communities, especially those that have been historically disadvantaged in accessing educational opportunities and career advancement in the health care professions”.

“In fiscal year 2023, the amount of \$1,250,000.00 is appropriated from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) – Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Funds to the Agency of Human Services to be distributed to the designated and specialized service agencies equitably based on each agency’s proportion of full-time-equivalent (FTE) mental health and substance use disorder treatment staff to the total number of FTE mental health and substance use disorder treatment staff across all designated and specialized service agencies statewide. The designated and specialized service agencies shall use these funds for loan repayment and tuition assistance to promote the recruitment and retention of high-quality mental health and substance use disorder treatment professionals available to Vermont residents in need of their services, as set forth in subsection (b) of this section.

(b)(1) Each designated and specialized service agency shall make the funds received pursuant to subsection (a) of this section available to its current and prospective employees as set forth in subdivisions (A) and (B) of this subdivision (1) on a rolling basis in exchange for a one-year service obligation to provide mental health services or substance use disorder treatment services, or both, at a designated or specialized service agency in this State. The funds may be used for the following purposes: (A) loan repayment for master’s-level clinicians, bachelor’s-level direct service staff, and nurses; and (B) tuition assistance for individuals pursuing degrees to become master’s-level clinicians, bachelor’s-level direct service staff, and nurses. (2) Loan repayment and tuition assistance funds shall be available to the current and prospective employees of designated and specialized service agencies in the form of forgivable loans, with the debt forgiven upon the employee’s completion of the required service obligation.” “