

I am on writing on behalf of Vermont HealthFirst's 62 physician-owned primary and specialty care practices. We kindly request your assistance in advocating to the US Department of Education to include physician-owned practices as eligible employers for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program. The PSLF is a program that forgives student loans for those who work in public service jobs, including in non-profit organizations and government agencies. However, the program currently excludes clinicians who work in private practices, even though those practices are committed to providing vital health care services to their communities, including those in rural and underserved areas.

Physician-owned practices play an important role in the US health system and are among the most affordable and accessible sites of care. However, physician-owned practices often struggle to compete with larger, better-funded healthcare organizations when it comes to recruiting and retaining qualified clinicians. For example, in Vermont, Federally Qualified Health Centers, and all hospitals, including the dominant University of Vermont Medical Center, are each considered eligible employers for the PSLF program. As future clinicians enter the field with high levels of student loan debt, most simply cannot consider working at an independent practice where loan forgiveness is not possible. This makes it extremely difficult for these high value practices to compete for clinicians. This in turn threatens the very existence of these foundational health care options.

To address this issue, we urge the Department of Education to revise the eligibility requirements for the PSLF program to include physician-owned practices that meet certain criteria. These criteria could include requirements for the practice to serve a certain percentage of low-income or underserved patients, to participate in Medicaid or other public health programs, or to meet certain quality standards. By expanding the eligibility requirements in this way, the Department of Education would help to level the playing field and ensure that physician-owned practices are not put at a competitive disadvantage in attracting and retaining qualified clinicians.

Thank you for the consideration. Please feel free to contact me if you would like more information.

Sincerely,

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