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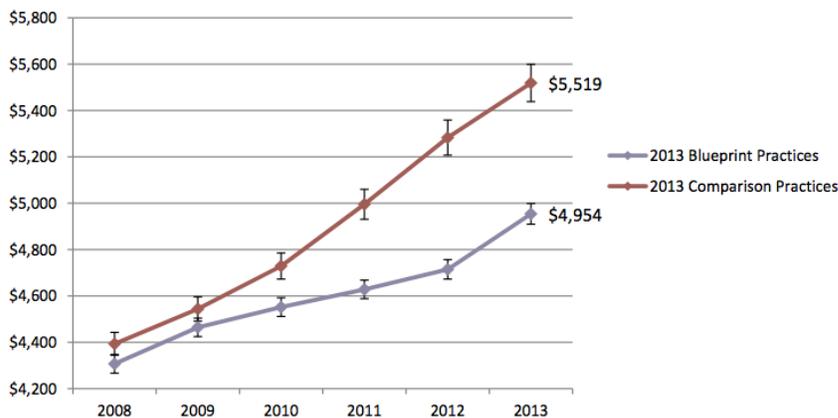
Dear Chairwoman Ancel, Vice Chairwoman Branagan, and Members of the Vermont Ways and Means Committee,

As primary care practices providing care to one in four Vermonters, we are writing in support of two items that are currently in play as the budget evolves in the Legislature. Specifically, we support the Governor's proposed increases to Blueprint payments for providers as an investment that pays for itself. Full funding of the Governor's proposal requires an increase of \$4.5 million.

We are also concerned about funding for the Area Health Education Centers (AHEC) and associated loan repayment funds. Full funding of AHEC requires \$225,000 in state funds for AHEC infrastructure and \$400,000 in state general funds to support practitioner loan repayment.

As you know, Vermont's Blueprint program is critical to maintaining and building on community-based primary care. The Blueprint payments align Vermont's primary care infrastructure with best practices to achieve strong results. The graph below is drawn from the Blueprint Program's 2014 annual report.

Figure 3. Total Expenditures Per Capita - Commercially Insured Ages 18-64



Practices achieve results depicted above by adding care management services, such as home assessments and medication management for people with diabetes and hypertension; or coordinating support with community partners in the housing sector, aging services, or others to ensure medical and social services are working together. Practices also use Blueprint

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resources to work with patients proactively on wellness goals, providing nutrition and weight counseling so patients have the tools to reach their goals. One of the Blueprint program's strengths is while holding providers accountable to a strong program (NCQA recognition is a requirement for each participating practice) it also allows practices flexibility to shape solutions for the particular needs of the community.

We also want to tell you how the Area Health Education Center (AHEC) program works for Vermonters. Vermont AHEC is a network of academic and community partners working together to improve the distribution, diversity, supply, and quality of the health care workforce in Vermont. Established in 1996, Vermont AHEC has a statewide infrastructure with a program office at the University of Vermont, College of Medicine, and three regional centers. Vermont AHEC focuses on achieving a well-trained workforce so that all Vermonters have access to quality care, especially those who live in Vermont's most rural and underserved areas.

In the past two years alone, the AHEC program provided over 4,000 Vermont school children with experience in a health career. This project is critical to helping Vermont's youth envision a health care career. For current health students, AHEC facilitate mentor relationships with 224 currently practicing providers. AHEC also delivered continuing education to 3,258 health care professionals and placed 20 physicians in community practice in Vermont.

AHEC also manages Vermont's education loan repayment (ELR) program. In 2014, AHEC received 447 applications. Only 130 of those could be funded despite Vermont's need to attract and place more primary care providers (including medical, dental, and mental health). The average educational debt for current dental applicants is \$224,236 (high of \$414,898) and \$131,976 (high of \$578,602) for primary care medical applicants. The average number of annual ELR awards over the past five years is 106 (primary care and dental).

As is true in other places in the country, Vermont's physician and dentist workforce is aging and will be retiring. We need to be actively and competitively recruiting to be successful in providing cost-effective and timely care. Other states offer generous loan repayment packages (including New Hampshire--\$75,000 for 3 years, Massachusetts--\$25,000 per year, and New York--\$150,000 over 5 years). Practicing in Vermont is attractive to many people, but the quality of life opportunity does not offset the burden of heavy student loan debt that health care clinicians frequently have.

Please add your endorsement to these important programs. Please get in touch with any of us if you have questions or want to learn more about how the Blueprint or AHEC programs help us provide excellent health care to Vermonters.

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