

To: The Honorable Peter Shumlin, Governor
From: The Governor's Health Care Workforce Advisory Group
Date: February 23, 2015
Re: VT Educational Loan Repayment Program, FY2016

Dear Governor Shumlin,

This letter serves to advise those making state policy and budget decisions related to Vermont's health care workforce and specifically to funding Vermont's Educational Loan Repayment Program (ELR) for Primary Care Providers in the 2016 state budget. The Governor's Health Care Workforce Advisory Group is currently charged to use the Vermont Health Care Workforce Strategic Plan (in accordance with Act 48, Section 12a) which was submitted to The General Assembly on January 15, 2013 by the Agency of Administration, to guide our work. The first recommendation of this plan is as follows:

*Recommendation #1: Under the auspices of the Agency of Administration, the Secretary of Administration shall convene and staff from within the Agency a permanent health care workforce working group (Workgroup) to monitor workforce trends, develop strategic objectives and activities, **direct and pursue funding for health care workforce development activities, and advise and report to the Secretary on its efforts.** The Workgroup shall include state government interagency representation as well as representation from health care employers, clinicians, membership organizations, secondary and higher education, and other relevant interest groups.*

The Strategic Plan also recommends the following: *Sub-recommendation #1f: **Assess and make recommendations regarding of the resources available to, and number of professions eligible for, Vermont's Loan Repayment Program.*** State resources currently available for educational loan repayment and loan forgiveness should be analyzed to assure that they are being directed to reducing maldistribution and to enhancing recruitment and retention of health care professionals.

Based on the effectiveness of this program and its vital role in recruiting and retaining health care professionals in Vermont, and the state's need to compete nationally for these highly skilled professionals, the Advisory Group's representatives from health care employers, clinicians, membership organizations, secondary and higher education, and other relevant interest groups request that the **ELR Program's FY 2016 funding is restored to the FY 2014 funding level of \$870,000** (impact on FY 2016 budget: approximately \$400,000 in state general funds to be matched with federal global commitment funds). It is noteworthy that past discussions have included the desirability to expand and enhance this program since educational debt is a significant factor for employment decisions of other health professionals, including mental health.

For more information, please see the attached documents: a summary of Vermont Educational Loan Repayment (ELR) Program for health care professionals, and a map detailing current vacancies in primary care.

Having an adequate number of health care professionals is vital to the health care reform efforts that Vermont has embarked upon and is foundational to providing access to primary and preventive care for all Vermonters. Educational loan repayment is a valuable tool to ensure that this happens.

Respectfully,

The Governor's Health Care Workforce Advisory Group

Enclosures

cc: The Honorable Justin Johnson, Secretary of Administration
Vermont House Appropriations Committee