



Amy O'Meara, DrNP, APRN
President

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April 10, 2015

Dear Members of the Senate Appropriations and Senate Health & Welfare Committees:

The Vermont Nurse Practitioner Association (VNPA) is very concerned about the proposal in the Governor's budget to eliminate funding for the EDUCATIONAL LOAN REPAYMENT (ELR) FOR HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONALS. This program, administered since 1997 by Area Health Education Centers, with 100% of funds used for awards, is a critical and effective tool for recruiting and retaining primary care (family medicine, general internal medicine, ob-gyn, pediatrics, geriatrics, psychiatry) practitioners (physicians, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants), dentists, nurses, and nurse educators for practice in Vermont. This program has strengthened the Vermont health care delivery system by responding to statewide workforce needs impacting access to care for all Vermonters.

The proposed elimination of ELR threatens access to care at a time when the state's population is growing older, health care access is declining and providers, especially primary care providers are facing reduced reimbursements. The *VT Health Care Workforce Strategic Plan* (in accordance with Act 48, Section 12a) submitted to The General Assembly on January 15, 2013 by the Agency of Administration, states that the loan repayment program "should be expanded to include more resources and the flexibility to target a wider breadth of professionals." (page 29) Eliminating this funding does not align with this important strategic plan and will harm Vermont citizens.

We are all aware of increasing educational costs and the corresponding educational debt for graduates. Awards granted under this program help to relieve the educational debt burden of health care providers and are critical to attracting and retaining providers and thereby ensuring access to care in Vermont. Other states offer

VTNPA
P.O. Box 64773
Burlington, Vermont 05406
www.vtnpa.enpnetwork.com

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. Without this program, Vermont will not be able to compete nationally for highly qualified health care providers. Because the workforce is foundational to health care access and delivery of care when and where it's needed for all citizens, VPNA is requesting that funding for ELR be restored.

Sincerely,

Amy O'Meara, DrNP, APRN
President, Vermont Nurse Practitioner Association
amy.omeara@uvm.edu

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