



20 February 2018

Dear Senator Kitchel,

On behalf of the 380 members of the Vermont State Dental Society, I am writing to ask you and your colleagues on the Appropriations Committee to fully restore the \$667,000 loan repayment program proposed to be cut in the FY19 Department of Health's budget.

You are well aware of the challenges facing the dentist workforce in Vermont in the coming years as our dentists continue to reach retirement age. I am also concerned about certain pockets (rural) of the State that may be especially feeling the effects of retiring dentists.

The VSDS has for years embarked on a multi-pronged strategy to recruit more dentists to Vermont, including our dental placement program which we annually support with over \$20,000. While we have had success in maintaining a level dental workforce for the past ten years, this task is becoming more challenging due to our aging dentists.

A critically important element of our recruitment strategy is the loan repayment program. The cost of a dental education is the highest of any health care provider. As such, I am seeing graduates emerge that in some cases face debt loads (undergraduate and graduate) approaching half a million dollars.

Vermont is also in stiff competition with our sister states in New England and beyond in efforts to recruit graduating dentists, especially to rural areas. Many of these states have the capacity and tools to offer considerably more in enticements to these graduates. But Vermont continues to hold its own due in large part to the loan repayment program. The Vermont loan repayment program requires recipients to serve Medicaid patients, which in turn leads to long term relationships with these patients. Recently most of the repayment awards have either gone to high need Medicaid areas of the state (many in rural areas) or to dentists that are practicing in Federally Qualified Health Centers.

Thank you for consideration of this issue and for all you and your colleagues can do to restore the loan repayment program. The VSDS and its members stand ready to assist in these efforts and provide any information you think is helpful.

Sincerely,

Vaughn Collins  
Executive Director

cc: Members, Senate Appropriations Committee  
Members, Senate Health & Welfare Committee