

No. 155. An act relating to increasing the supply of nurses and primary care providers in Vermont.

(H.607)

It is hereby enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont:

Sec. 1. 18 V.S.A. § 9491 is amended to read:

§ 9491. HEALTH CARE WORKFORCE; STRATEGIC PLAN

(a) The Director of Health Care Reform in the Agency of Human Services shall ~~oversee the development of~~ maintain a current health care workforce development strategic plan that continues efforts to ensure that Vermont has the health care workforce necessary to provide care to all Vermont residents. ~~The Director of Health Care Reform may designate an entity responsible for convening meetings and for preparing the draft strategic plan. The Green Mountain Care Board established in chapter 220 of this title shall review the draft strategic plan and shall approve the final plan and any subsequent modifications.~~

(b)(1) ~~The~~ In maintaining the strategic plan, the Director or designee shall collaborate with the area health education centers, ~~the State Workforce Development Board established in 10 V.S.A. § 541a, the Prekindergarten-16 Council established in 16 V.S.A. § 2905, the Department of Labor, the Department of Health, the Department of Vermont Health Access, and other interested parties to develop and maintain the plan~~ consult with an advisory group composed of the following 11 members, at least one of whom shall be a nurse, to develop and maintain the strategic plan:

(A) one representative of the Green Mountain Care Board's primary care advisory group;

(B) one representative of the Vermont State Colleges;

(C) one representative of the Area Health Education Centers' workforce initiative;

(D) one representative of federally qualified health centers;

(E) one representative of Vermont hospitals;

(F) one representative of physicians;

(G) one representative of mental health professionals;

(H) one representative of dentists;

(I) one representative of naturopathic physicians;

(J) one representative of home health agencies; and

(K) one representative of long-term care facilities.

(2) The Director or designee shall serve as the chair of the advisory group.

(c) The Director of Health Care Reform shall ensure that the strategic plan includes recommendations on how to develop Vermont's health care workforce, including:

(1) the current capacity and capacity issues of the health care workforce and delivery system in Vermont, including the shortages of health care professionals, specialty practice areas that regularly face shortages of qualified

health care professionals, issues with geographic access to services, and unmet health care needs of Vermonters;

(2) ~~the resources needed to ensure that:~~

~~(A) the health care workforce and the delivery system are able to provide sufficient access to services given demographic factors in the population and in the workforce, as well as other factors;~~

~~(B) the health care workforce and the delivery system are able to participate fully in health care reform initiatives, including establishing a medical home for all Vermont residents through the Blueprint for Health pursuant to chapter 13 of this title and transitioning to electronic medical records; and~~

~~(C) all Vermont residents have access to appropriate mental health care that meets standards of quality, access, and affordability equivalent to other components of health care as part of an integrated, holistic system of care;~~

~~(3) how State government, universities and colleges, the State's educational system, entities providing education and training programs related to the health care workforce, and others may develop the resources in the health care workforce and delivery system to educate, recruit, and retain health care professionals to achieve Vermont's health care reform principles and purposes; and~~

~~(4) reviewing data on the extent to which individual health care professionals begin and cease to practice in their applicable fields in Vermont;~~

~~(5) identifying factors which either hinder or assist in recruitment or retention of health care professionals, including an examination of the processes for prior authorizations, and making recommendations for further improving recruitment and retention efforts;~~

~~(6)(3) assessing the availability of State and federal funds for health care workforce development.~~

~~(e) Beginning January 15, 2013, the Director or designee shall provide the strategic plan approved by the Green Mountain Care Board to the General Assembly and shall provide periodic updates on modifications as necessary.~~

Sec. 2. HEALTH CARE WORKFORCE STRATEGIC PLAN; REPORT

(a) The Director of Health Care Reform, in connection with the advisory group established pursuant to 18 V.S.A. § 9491(b) in Sec. 1 of this act, shall update the health care workforce strategic plan as set forth in 18 V.S.A. § 9491 and shall submit a draft of the plan to the Green Mountain Care Board for its review and approval on or before July 1, 2021. The Board shall review and approve the plan within 30 days following receipt.

(b) On or before August 15, 2021, the Director shall provide the updated health care workforce strategic plan to the House Committees on Appropriations, on Health Care, and on Commerce and Economic

Development and the Senate Committees on Appropriations, on Health and Welfare, and on Economic Development, Housing and General Affairs.

Sec. 3. 18 V.S.A. § 33 is added to read:

§ 33. MEDICAL STUDENTS; PRIMARY CARE

(a) The Department of Health, in collaboration with the Office of Primary Care and Area Health Education Centers Program at the University of Vermont College of Medicine (AHEC), shall establish a primary care physician scholarship program. The scholarships shall cover the medical school tuition for up to five third-year and up to five fourth-year medical students annually who commit to practicing primary care in a rural area of this State or in a Vermont federally qualified health center's service area, in a setting or practice not owned by an academic medical center. For each academic year of tuition covered by the scholarship, the recipient shall incur an obligation of two years of full-time service or four years of half-time service. Students receiving a scholarship for their third year of medical school shall be eligible to receive another scholarship for their fourth year of medical school. The amount of each scholarship shall be set at the in-state tuition rate less any other State or federal educational grant assistance the student receives for the same academic year.

(b) Approved specialties shall be all of the specialties recognized by the National Health Service Corps at the time of the scholarship award, which may

include family medicine, internal medicine, pediatrics, obstetrics-gynecology, and psychiatry.

(c) A scholarship recipient who does not fulfill the commitment to practice primary care in accordance with the terms of the award shall be liable for repayment of the full amount of the scholarship, plus interest calculated in accordance with the formula determined by the National Health Service Corps for failure to complete a service obligation under that program.

Sec. 4. PRIMARY CARE PHYSICIAN SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM;

APPROPRIATION

(a) The sum of \$608,419.00 in Global Commitment investment funds is appropriated to the Department of Health in fiscal year 2021 for scholarships for medical students who commit to practicing primary care in this State in accordance with 18 V.S.A. § 33.

(b)(1) The Secretary of Human Services, in consultation with the Department of Health, the University of Vermont College of Medicine, and the advisory group established in 18 V.S.A. § 9491(b), shall identify funding sources from existing State budget allocations or new revenue sources to provide the State match in future fiscal years for scholarship funds to expand Vermont's primary care physician workforce to ensure that Vermonters have access to necessary health care services, preferably in their own communities.

(2) On or before March 1, 2021, the Secretary shall report to the House Committees on Appropriations and on Health Care and the Senate Committees

on Appropriations and on Health and Welfare the funding sources identified for the ongoing State match for the primary care physician scholarship program.

Sec. 5. EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE; NURSING STUDENTS;

APPROPRIATION

(a) The sum of \$1,035,957.00 in Global Commitment investment funds is appropriated to the Department of Health for additional scholarships for nursing students pursuant to the program established in 18 V.S.A. § 31, as redesignated by Sec. 7 of this act, and administered by the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation.

(b)(1) First priority for the scholarship funds shall be given to students pursuing a practical nursing certificate who will be eligible to sit for the NCLEX-PN examination upon completion of the certificate.

(2) Second priority for the scholarship funds shall be given to students pursuing an associate's degree in nursing who will be eligible to sit for the NCLEX-RN examination upon graduation.

(3) Third priority for the scholarship funds shall be given to students pursuing a bachelor of science degree in nursing.

(c) To be eligible for a scholarship under this section, applicants shall:

(1) demonstrate financial need;

(2) demonstrate academic capacity by carrying at least a 2.5 grade point average in their course of study prior to receiving the fund award; and

(3) agree to work as a nurse in Vermont for a minimum of one year following licensure for each year of scholarship awarded.

(d) Students attending an accredited postsecondary educational institution in Vermont shall receive first preference for scholarships.

(e) There shall be no deadline to apply for a scholarship under this section. Scholarships shall be awarded on a rolling basis as long as funds are available, and any funds remaining at the end of fiscal year 2021 shall roll over and shall be available to the Department of Health in fiscal year 2022 for additional scholarships as described in this section.

(f) The Director of Health Care Reform in the Agency of Human Services, in consultation with the Department of Health, the Agency of Commerce and Community Development, and the advisory group established in 18 V.S.A. § 9491(b), shall identify the primary causes of Vermont's nursing workforce shortage and shall propose solutions to address those causes. On or before March 1, 2021, the Director of Health Care Reform shall submit his or her findings and recommendations to the House Committees on Appropriations and on Health Care and the Senate Committees on Appropriations and on Health and Welfare, including:

(1) an assessment of the existing nursing career ladders at health care facilities in this State and their relationships with programs at Vermont's institutions of higher education;

(2) other states' successful strategies for expanding their nursing workforces; and

(3) in the event that inadequate scholarship funding is identified as a barrier to expanding Vermont's nursing workforce, proposals for existing State budget allocations or new revenue sources that can be used for nursing scholarships to ensure that Vermonters have access to necessary health care services, preferably in their own communities.

Sec. 5a. SCHOLARSHIP FUNDING; STATE MATCH; APPROPRIATION

The sum of \$750,000.00 is appropriated from the General Fund to the Agency of Human Services in fiscal year 2021 to provide the State match for the scholarship funds appropriated in Secs. 4 (primary care physician scholarship program; appropriation) and 5 (educational assistance; nursing students; appropriation) of this act.

Sec. 5b. VERMONT TRAINING PROGRAM; REVERSION

In fiscal year 2021, \$200,000.00 of the funds appropriated to the Department of Economic Development for the Vermont Training Program shall revert to the General Fund.

Sec. 6. 18 V.S.A. chapter 1 is amended to read:

CHAPTER 1. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH; GENERAL PROVISIONS

Subchapter 1. General Provisions

§ 1. GENERAL POWERS OF DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

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Subchapter 2. Health Care Professions; Educational Assistance

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Sec. 7. REDESIGNATIONS

(a) 18 V.S.A. § 10 (educational assistance; incentives; nurses) is redesignated to be 18 V.S.A. § 31 in 18 V.S.A. chapter 1, subchapter 2.

(b) 18 V.S.A. § 10a (loan repayment for health care providers and Health Care Educational Loan Repayment Fund) is redesignated to be 18 V.S.A. § 32 in 18 V.S.A. chapter 1, subchapter 2.

Sec. 7a. SUNSET

18 V.S.A. § 33 (medical students; primary care) is repealed on July 1, 2022.

Sec. 8. EFFECTIVE DATE

This act shall take effect on November 1, 2020.

Date Governor signed bill: October 5, 2020.