

Workforce Development Language Recommendation
Vermont Care Partners
May 10, 2019

The workforce language developed by the House and Senate was shared with Executive Directors and Human Resource Directors of designated and specialized service agencies (DA/SSAs) for feedback. All agencies believe that tuition assistance and loan repayment will be a tremendous benefit for our staff recruitment and retention efforts and are very appreciative of the support this resource will provide for improving access to and quality of care.

In response to the Senate language:

- All agencies are open to working with either VSAC or AHEC. Several Agencies report positive experiences working with AHEC in the past.
- It is our understanding that the intent of the language is for DA/SSA employees who provide mental health, substance use disorder or developmental disability services will be eligible for the benefits. This is important to maintain equity among staff. Many of the people we serve in these programs have multiple and co-occurring conditions.
- Many of our staff attending or returning to degree programs do so on-line, which most often is through an out-of-state educational institution with curriculum that can lead to licensure in Vermont. Online programs are convenient for many staff who have tight schedules – some work multiple jobs and some are caring for families.
- Additionally, access to Vermont universities and colleges from some regions of the state is challenging due to distance.
- All agencies recruit staff from out-of-state. The majority of agencies have some staff that reside in bordering states. We recommend that the language be adjusted to allow these potential and existing staff to access these benefits. If the goal is to reduce barriers & add incentives for employment, we shouldn't restrict access to either VT residents or to those enrolled in VT institutions, the criteria should be *employment by a Vermont DA/SSA*.
- An advantage of the Senate language is that it would enable access to this needed resource as soon as the agency administering the grants is ready to go.

The budget line item in the Senate is \$1.5 million and in the House the language appears to apply to the full \$5 million appropriated in last session. Vermont Care Partners has requested a \$3 million appropriation over 3 years. This would enable the investment of \$2 million in the programs proposed by the University of Vermont and/or Vermont State Colleges.

Sec. E.301.2 MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER WORKFORCE;

(a) The \$1,500,000 allocated to the Agency of Human Services for fiscal year 2019 pursuant to 2018 (Sp. Sess.) Acts and Resolves No. 11, Sec. C.106.1(b)(2) shall be carried forward to fiscal year 2020 and be used for loan repayment and tuition assistance to promote the recruitment and retention of high-quality providers of mental health and substance use disorder treatment services in Vermont. The funds shall be made available to Vermont residents, and to residents of other states enrolled in Vermont educational institutions, based on a three-year commitment to provide mental health services or substance use

disorder treatment services, or both, in Vermont, for the following uses: (1) loan repayment for masters-level clinicians, bachelor's-level direct service staff, and nurses; and (2) tuition assistance for individuals pursuing degrees to become masters-level clinicians, bachelor's level direct service staff, and nurses.

(b) The Agency may contract with Area Health Education Centers or the Vermont Student Assistance Corporation or both to administer these programs. (c) The fiscal year 2020 appropriation pursuant to 2018 (Sp. Sess.) Acts and Resolves No. 11, Sec. C.106.1(b)(2) shall be reserved to be addressed in the fiscal year 2020 budget adjustment or fiscal year 2021 budget processes.

(budgeted amount \$1.5 million)

House version:

Sec. E.301.2 REPORT; SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER AND MENTAL HEALTH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

(a) On or before August 1, 2019, the Agency of Human Services, in consultation with community providers of substance use disorder and mental health services, shall submit a framework for distributing workforce development funds appropriated pursuant to 2018 (Sp. Sess.) Acts and Resolves No. 11, Sec. C.106.1. The framework shall be submitted to the Health Reform Oversight Committee and shall include tuition assistance and loan repayment for masters level clinicians with a MSW, MA, or MS; bachelors level direct service staff; and nurses. Any tuition assistance and loan repayment provided using funds appropriated pursuant to 2018 (Sp. Sess.) Acts and Resolves No. 11, Sec. C.106.1 shall require a three-year commitment to full-time employment at a designated or specialized service agency.

(Applies to full \$5 million)