



RICHARD L. PAGE, M.D.
DEAN

September 9, 2020

Senator Virginia Lyons
via: vlyons@leg.state.vt.us
Vermont State House
115 State Street
Montpelier, VT 05633

Dear Senator Lyons,

I am grateful for the opportunity to testify to your Senate Committee on Health and Welfare and to provide this letter in support of bill H.607, on behalf of The Robert Larner, M.D. College of Medicine, as it relates to the primary care physician workforce in Vermont.

As you may know, I had the opportunity to visit with Representative Conquest early in this process, and provided testimony to the Vermont House Committee on Healthcare in support of the bill. H.607 has been further refined, with emphasis on developing a Vermont Healthcare Workforce Strategic Plan, a scholarship program for medical students, and educational assistance for nursing students.

This focus on students, with acknowledgement that this is a part of the more comprehensive strategic plan yet to be developed, allows for immediate impact on our pipeline even as our state examines the various levers available to increase primary care in rural Vermont.

Medical school is expensive, and the Larner College of Medicine is no exception. There are many factors that influence a medical student's choice of specialty, but student debt and later compensation can play a role. Furthermore, when a student decides to practice in one of the primary care specialties, our nation is filled with opportunities outside of our state. The proposed scholarship program has the fundamental strengths of defraying medical school cost for one or both of the latter two years with a contractual obligation that students will "pay back" two years, for each year of support, in rural service to our state. I believe that this combination, applied to as many as ten students per year, will increase the number of primary care physicians practicing in rural Vermont over the long term. As such, I enthusiastically endorse this bill on behalf of the Larner College of Medicine.

Senator Virginia Lyons
September 9, 2020
Page 2

I understand that there may have been some confusion last week about support for this bill from the Area Health Education Center (AHEC). I have discussed this at length with Dr. Charles MacLean, Associate Dean for Primary Care, and the leader of the Office of Primary Care and AHEC Program. Dr. MacLean has made it clear that he endorses H.607 as a concrete step toward supporting our healthcare workforce. Furthermore, he and I have agreed that we will work together to develop the infrastructure for administration of this scholarship program.

Dr. MacLean and I also support the development of a Vermont Healthcare Workforce Strategic Plan, developed by a diverse group of stakeholders. This group could develop and oversee a robust plan to promote the pipeline, recruitment and retention of primary care physicians in Vermont. On a practical matter, this group could provide guidance on how to determine which locations in Vermont would be eligible for scholarship payback in a “rural, health professional shortage or medically underserved area of this State.” Dr. MacLean and I would like to offer the support of AHEC and the Larner College of Medicine in providing the appropriate individuals with expertise to serve this working group.

In closing, I want to thank you and your committee for your consideration of my strong endorsement for H.607. This bill provides the opportunity to make a difference in the careers of our medical students and the primary care of rural Vermonters. This is an important step toward our goal of supporting high-quality care to those who need it, where they are, throughout our state.

Sincerely,



Richard L. Page, M.D.
Dean

cc: Dr. Charles MacLean