

To: Senator Jane KitcheI, Chair of the Senate Committee on Appropriations
Senator Ginny Lyons, Chair of the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

CC: Representative Mary Hooper, Chair of the House Committee on Appropriations
Representative William Lippert, Chair of the House Committee on Health Care
Representative David Yacovone, House Committee on Appropriations

Re: Health Care Workforce Retention Funding

Date: January 19, 2022

Dear Chair KitcheI, Senate Committee on Appropriations, and Chair Lyons, Senate Committee on Health and Welfare:

We first want to thank the Legislature and particularly the committees of jurisdiction for tackling the health care workforce crisis so quickly in the 2022 legislative session. We applaud the speed at which you are considering this crisis. However, H. 679, Sect 72 as reported out of the House Committee on Appropriations creates a workforce retention funding program for health care and social services employers that does not include primary care, unlike the initial program proposed by the Agency of Human Services, which had more flexibility. While we recognize the critical needs of our partners in the health system, we ask that you also include primary care employers and recognize that many of our practices and health centers are struggling to retain enough nursing, medical assistant and other staff to meet the essential needs of their patients and communities.

Workforce shortages in primary care’s clinical and non-clinical positions existed before the COVID-19 pandemic; however, these shortages have only grown in the intervening 21 months as providers and staff have faced increased risk to themselves and their families, burnout, and the need to care for family members such as children with reduced access to childcare or school. With the health care workforce shortage nationally and locally, the cost of recruiting, training, and retaining our workforce is high and increasing. As leadership from a federally qualified health center (FQHC) stated, “workforce is always concerning.... We seem to always need more nursing and the salaries are not sustainable.”

Robust primary care is a key part of the health care system, especially a system trying to improve population health, improve the quality and experience of care, and set health care expenditures on a more sustainable trajectory. But primary care is struggling now and needs support. We respectfully request that you include primary care in your deliberations on retention funding for health care workers. The below signatories are happy to provide written or verbal comment before your committees.

Sincerely,

Jessa Barnard
Vermont Medical Society

Susan Ridzon
HealthFirst Independent Practice Association

Mary Kate Mohlman
Bi-State Primary Care Association

Stephanie Winters
Vermont Academy of Family Physicians
American Academy of Pediatrics – Vermont Chapter