

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1230

*As Reported By House Committee on:
Higher Education*

Title: An act relating to mental health practitioners' conditional scholarship program.

Brief Description: Creating a mental health practitioners' conditional scholarship program.

Sponsor(s): Representatives Fraser, Prince, Jacobsen, Belcher, Sheldon, Ogden, Moyer, Ludwig, Morris, Winsley, Dellwo and Spanel.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Higher Education, February 11, 1991, DPS.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
HIGHER EDUCATION**

Majority Report: *That Substitute House Bill No. 1230 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.*
Signed by 12 members: Representatives Jacobsen, Chair; Ogden, Vice Chair; Wood, Ranking Minority Member; May, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Basich; Fraser; Ludwig; Miller; Prince; Sheldon; Spanel; and Van Luven.

Staff: Susan Hosch (786-7120).

Background: During the last five years, the Legislature has enacted a number of scholarship programs to attract students into professions needed by the State. Through the Future Teachers Conditional Scholarship Program, outstanding students receive a conditional scholarship of \$3,000 per year for a maximum of five years. That scholarship is forgiven if, upon graduation, each student teaches in the public schools of the State for ten years. If a student does not meet that commitment, he or she must repay the scholarship, with interest, over a ten year period.

The Nurses Conditional Scholarship Program, enacted in 1988, followed a similar model. Students may receive \$3,000 per year for a maximum of five years. The conditional scholarship is forgiven if, upon graduation, the nurse works in a nursing shortage area for five years. Otherwise, the

scholarship must be repaid, with interest over a five year period.

The Rural Physician, Pharmacists, and Midwife Scholarship Program was established in 1990. Medical students participating in the program may receive up to \$15,000 per year for three years. Students studying pharmacy and midwifery may receive \$4000 per year for three years. The conditional scholarships are forgiven if, for a minimum of five years, the medical students work in a rural area, and the other students work in an area in which pharmacy or midwifery skills are lacking. Otherwise, the students must repay twice the amount they received in scholarship.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Mental Health Practitioners' Conditional Scholarship Program is established. Students pursuing degrees in a mental health profession are eligible for the program. These degrees include: an associate of arts degree in a mental health profession; a bachelor of arts degree in social work or a behavioral science; and a master's degree in a behavioral science, nursing science, social work, or related field.

The program will be administered by the Higher Education Coordinating Board. The board will convene a planning committee to assist in developing criteria for selecting participants and establishing the provisions of service contracts. The board's other program responsibilities are also described. These responsibilities include selecting program participants, collecting and managing repayments, and developing criteria for service contracts. Service contracts may permit alternative service in lieu of the service obligation participants normally incur under the program. Service contracts may include a combination of service and payment.

Participants may receive up to \$4,000 per year for a maximum of five years. Program participants must repay the conditional scholarship, with interest, unless they meet a service obligation. The obligation is to serve as a mental health practitioner in a community mental health program located in the State in an area with a shortage of mental health practitioners. For each year that a participant received a conditional scholarship, he or she must provide one year of full-time service. Otherwise, participants must repay the scholarship, with interest, over a five year period. The terms of repayment will be consistent with those in the Guaranteed Student Loan Program. The Department of Social and Health Services will define mental health shortage area.

Students in the Nurses Conditional Scholarship Program are not eligible to participate in this program. No conditional scholarships may be granted after June 30, 1997, unless the scholarships are re-authorized by the Legislature.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: Program definitions are clarified. For each year of scholarship assistance received, participants must serve in a community mental health program for one year, rather than two years. The board will convene a planning committee to assist in establishing service contract language and participant selection criteria. Expertise to be included on the planning committee is described.

Fiscal Note: Requested February 11, 1991.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Community mental health centers are having a difficult time recruiting and retaining qualified professionals to work with persons who are mentally ill. Many reasons for this difficulty exist, not the least of which is the relatively low wages paid to mental health practitioners. The turnover rate of qualified mental health practitioners in the Northwest is 32.4 percent. This rate exceeds the national turnover rate of 26 percent. In September, an estimated 350 vacancies were reported for mental health practitioners in community mental health centers. That rate is estimated to rise to 500 vacancies by July of 1991. A taskforce created by the Legislature recommended the establishment of a conditional scholarship program. Through the program, qualified individuals can be recruited into academic fields needed by community mental health programs. The program can also help professionals in community mental health centers receive additional education and training.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: David Hanig, Department of Social and Health Services; Hal Gutting, Kitsap Mental Health Services; Vern Gordon, UFCW (union representative); Pat DeBoer, Alliance for Mentally Ill of Washington State; Gary Rose, WCDMHP (mental health professionals organization); Don Zazon, Peninsula Counseling Center; and Tim Miller, Kitsap Mental Health Services.