
Appropriations Committee

HB 1080

Brief Description: Restoring funding to the health professional loan repayment and scholarship program fund.

Sponsors: Representatives Harris, Senn, Appleton, Gregerson, Cody, Caldier and Pollet.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Finds that improved access to health care services is vital to achieve health equity and an increased quality of healthy life.
- Finds that students who are encouraged to explore the benefits and challenges in rural health practice are more likely to establish community roots and remain in the area in which they are trained.
- Appropriates \$4 million per year from the State General Fund to the Health Professional Loan Repayment and Scholarship Program Fund.

Hearing Date: 1/28/15

Staff: Catrina Lucero (786-7192).

Background:

Health Professional Shortage Area.

State statute defines a health professional shortage area as an area where credentialed health care professionals are in short supply as a result of geographic maldistribution or as the result of a short supply of credentialed health care professionals in specialty health care areas where vacancies exist in serious numbers that jeopardize patient care and pose a threat to the public health and safety.

Health Professionals Loan Repayment Program.

The Health Professional Loan Repayment and Scholarship Program (Program) encourages primary care health professionals to serve in critical shortage areas. Program participants pledge to work in rural or underserved urban areas with designated shortages and receive financial

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assistance through conditional scholarship or loan repayment. The Program has funded over 1,000 professionals in 38 counties since 1990. It is administered by the Washington Student Achievement Council. Funding for the Program was temporarily suspended in 2010. This temporary suspension was continued in the 2011-13 and 2013-15 operating budgets. The Legislature continued funding the state matching funds (\$525,000 per year) that allow the state to participate in the federal State Loan Repayment Program and for students already enrolled in the Program during the temporary suspension. The current suspension ends June 30, 2015. Assuming no action by the Legislature, the Program would resume, at a cost of \$3,825,000 per year.

Summary of Bill:

The Legislature finds that improved access to comprehensive health care services is vital to achieve health equity and an increased quality of healthy life for Washington residents. The Legislature further finds that students who are encouraged to explore the benefits and unique professional challenges presented in rural health practice are more likely to establish community roots and remain in the area in which they are trained.

The amount of \$4 million per year is appropriated from the State General Fund to the Health Professional Loan Repayment and Scholarship Program Fund.

Appropriation: The sum of \$4 million from the State General Fund to the Health Professional Loan Repayment and Scholarship Program Fund.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.