

A Bill for an Act Relating to Loan Repayment for Health Care Professionals.

*Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Hawaii:*

SECTION 1. The legislature finds that many Hawaii residents are unable to obtain timely and appropriate health care due to shortages of primary health care providers in the State. These shortages threaten individual health and cumulatively affect the State's health care costs. The State's rural areas, which have been designated by the federal government as medically underserved areas, have been most significantly affected by shortages of primary and behavioral health care providers.

The increasingly high cost of education for health care professionals binds graduates to a career path focused on pursuing an income that makes it possible to repay often exorbitant student loans. These career paths most often lead to professional practice in highly specialized areas of care in urban areas and not to general practice on neighbor islands or in rural areas where the need is greatest. The legislature finds that counties in the United States with robust primary health care systems have lower costs and improved patient outcomes. Recognizing this relationship, many states have made the policy decision to dedicate public funds to the development of a strong primary health care workforce.

The only loan repayment program currently available in this State is administered by the John A. Burns school of medicine at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. This program leverages private donations to access matching federal funds through the State Loan Repayment Program of the National Health Service Corps branch of the Department of Health and Human Services. Since September 1, 2012, a total of twenty-five physicians, nurse practitioners, and psychologists have received loan repayment assistance through the program in exchange for work in underserved geographic and practice areas in Hawaii. Currently, health care professionals who have benefited from the loan repayment program serve in the community in Waianae, Hilo, and Wailuku; at health clin-

ics in Kalihi-Palama Health Center, Queen Emma Clinic, and Waikiki Health Center; and in public institutional settings at the Federal Detention Center, Honolulu and Halawa correctional facility.

The purpose of this Act is to appropriate funds to the department of health to fund the health care provider loan repayment program administered through the John A. Burns school of medicine to provide loan repayment for physicians, physician assistants, psychologists, and nurse practitioners who agree to work in a federally-designated health professional shortage area or an area of Hawaii found to be underserved.

SECTION 2. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$250,000 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2017-2018 and the same sum or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2018-2019 for the health care provider loan repayment program; provided that no funds shall be expended unless matched on a dollar-for-dollar basis by funds from a private or other public source.

The sums appropriated shall be expended by the department of health in coordination with the John A. Burns school of medicine of the University of Hawaii at Manoa for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 3. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2017.

(Approved June 22, 2017.)