

HCS HB 720 -- MISSOURI STATE LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM

SPONSOR: Diehl

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Health and Mental Health by a vote of 16 to 0. Voted "Do Pass" by the Standing Committee on Rules-Administrative by a vote of 8 to 0.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HB 720.

This bill modifies provisions relating to the existing "Health Professional Student Loan Repayment Program" by renaming it to the "Missouri State Loan Repayment Program (MOSLRP)" and expanding the program to include those who have graduated from an accredited graduate training program in a discipline designated by the Department of Health and Senior Services.

Current law requires, in order to be eligible to participate in the program, that a person is enrolled as either a full-time medical student, dental student, or chiropractic student, and is in the final year of course study, or that a person is licensed to practice in these fields. This provision and the designation for an area in need of chiropractic services are repealed and replaced with the requirements that the person is authorized to practice as any type of health professional and is going to practice in an area of defined need.

The bill requires that 35% of the annual appropriated funds that are allocated to this loan repayment program must be designated for awards to primary care physicians and general dentists, and unused portions of those designated funds will be made available in the same fiscal year to the other types of health professions designated by the Department.

Current law establishes liability to the State for individuals who have entered into written contracts with the Department and who either fail to maintain an acceptable level of academic standing, who voluntarily terminate enrollment, or who are dismissed from the institution; these persons are liable to the State for the amount that has been paid on their behalf under the contract. This bill repeals that provision.

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

PROPONENTS: Supporters say that this bill was a proposal from the Department of Health and Senior Services to draw down more Federal funds from a program that outlines eligible professions to get assistance. The State match is currently limited by what is currently in statute, and while the state has other programs to support other professions, it can leverage existing dollars to draw down more Federal funds to stymie the decreased enrollment of these professions and an aging workforce, leading to a greater gap to be overcome in the future.

Testifying in person for the bill were Representative Diehl; National Association of Social Workers MO Chapter; Missouri Psychological Association; Missouri Nurses Association; Association of Missouri Nurse Practitioners; Associated Students of The University of Missouri; Chance Hepola, Cox Health; Missouri Hospital Association; and Ben Terrell, Department of Health and Senior Services.

OPPOSITION: There was no opposition to the bill voiced in person to the committee.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say that there is a severe shortage of primary care physicians, who receive the maximum amount of funding currently available; if the base of applicants were to be broadened, there is an outstanding question of how the individuals currently getting the funds would retain that level of funding when in competition with more applicants.

Testifying in person on the bill was Missouri State Medical Association.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony and witnesses testifying online can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.