

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

Representative Bob Herron

Official Business



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House Bill 78 – Incentives for Certain Medical Providers

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SPONSOR STATEMENT

Alaska communities, both urban and rural, face a serious shortage of health care providers that, if not immediately addressed, will rapidly worsen. In response to this challenge, HB 78 creates the Alaska Health Care Professions Loan Repayment & Incentive Program (HCPLRIP) - a loan repayment and direct monetary incentive program, which will quickly reduce the shortage by filling vacant health care provider positions throughout the state with both new and experienced health care professionals.

Similar programs have proven effective in other states. Alaska's HCPLRIP will support up to 90 participants each year, spread across 10 different essential health care occupation shortage areas¹. 30 of these slots will be reserved for the most underserved areas of the state, designated by the Commissioner of Health and Social Services as having the greatest need². Benefit will not be limited to rural Alaska, however; there is also room for urban health care providers.

Other health workforce supports exist, but they are not enough³. HCPLRIP is an effective and efficient step to fill the gaps in our current health care service landscape. When implemented, Alaska's HCPLRIP will be one of very few in the United States offering incentives to mid-career professionals who may have already exhausted other loan repayment options, or who no longer carry educational loan debt. This feature will serve as a powerful recruitment tool, bringing with it the benefit of experience only seasoned professionals carry. New graduate or mid-career, HB 78 is designed to bring them here, bring them home - and keep them here for the long term.

It is critical that we promptly address Alaska's healthcare workforce shortage, in order to ensure that all Alaskans have meaningful access to the basic health care they need. HB 78 is not a comprehensive solution, but a proven, manageable, measurable step we can take right now.

Please join me in support of HB 78.

¹ Three positions will be reserved for practitioners in each of the following professional groups: dentist, pharmacist, physician, dental hygienist, registered nurse, advanced nurse practitioner, physician assistant, physical therapist, clinical psychologist, and Master's level or higher clinical social worker. Other slots will be filled as needs are identified.

² Based upon ongoing needs assessment and employment statistics.

³ The valuable WWAMI program, which I fully support, is on its own not enough to meet Alaska's complex health care needs. Students who eventually practice in Alaska can only do so once their education is complete. In addition, the program only supplies physicians, while Alaska demands a variety of health care professionals.