



RESOLUTION 2011-02 Health Care Professionals Incentive Program

WHEREAS the Alaska Primary Care Association strives toward the goal of a healthy population, it recognizes that a robust health care workforce is necessary to provide adequate health care access for all Alaskans and is a key ingredient in improving the public health of all Alaskans; and

WHEREAS Alaska is competing nationally for the finite pool of available health care professionals; and Alaska is suffering from labor shortages in most health care occupations,¹ demonstrated by the fact that most of the state is designated either a Health Professional Shortage Area or a Medically Underserved Area,² and these shortages are particularly acute for primary care "safety net" agencies; and

WHEREAS a common state-level response to these pressures is the use and state funding of financial inducements, collectively known as support-for-service programs (SFSPs), and good outcomes have been achieved with these,³ and national studies have determined loan repayment programs and incentive programs to be two of the most effective of the several SFSP strategies in terms of both recruitment and retention of new providers and experienced providers respectively;⁴ and

WHEREAS Alaska does not have a robust SFSP while most other states do, many have several, and some of those are growing, and these SFSP assist with the geographic and specialty distributions of providers in these states;⁵ and

WHEREAS it is well-established that many health professionals carry a heavy debt-burden from the date of graduation and are attracted to locations where a share of that burden can be relieved; and

WHEREAS for areas in the state where providers are required to work in professional isolation due to remote settings, direct incentives are needed to attract more experienced health care providers who do not carry debt and are considered desirable placements, and direct incentives can also be used to recruit and retain recent graduates who can use the incentives to pay student loans; and

WHEREAS the State of Alaska is making positive and important strides to reduce the health care workforce shortage administering a small, newly created federally and AMHTA and CHC funded program called SHARP (Supporting Health-care Access through loan Repayment), Alaska also needs a state-designed and state-controlled program to allow us to address our unique needs and help us be more competitive with other states in drawing candidates: ensuring an adequate number of provider slots, providing for certain health care professional categories not included in SHARP that are in shortage, allowing for greater flexibility in placements, and offering incentives to experienced providers without student loans as well as recent graduates with student loans; and

WHEREAS in 2006, the Alaska Physician Supply Task Force recommended specific strategies and action steps to assure an adequate supply of physicians to meet Alaska's need, including creation of a SFSP, and the 2007 Alaska Workforce Vacancy Study and the 2005-2006 Status of Recruitment Resources and Strategies (SORRAS II) point to the need for a state loan repayment and incentive program; and



WHEREAS a proposal submitted to the Alaska Primary Care Council by DHSS Health Planning and Systems Development recommends that “Alaska create a ‘Health Care Professions Loan Repayment Program’”⁶ based on the following logic;

Reported increasing vacancy rates, increasing costs of recruitment [SORRAS report,] and comparisons with national norms [PSTF report] suggest that Alaska (per DHHS March 2009 data 7,) currently experiences a shortage of healthcare professionals, and, that shortages exist in several key occupational categories.

Loan repayment programs have demonstrated substantial and longstanding success as a public strategy which has helped to rectify such shortages;⁸

WHEREAS, the Alaska Health Care Commission, in its 2009 Report / 2010-2014 Strategic Plan entitled “Transforming Health Care in Alaska,” recommends as a goal to the Governor and Legislature the following: “Develop the health care workforce.....[by] increas[ing] the supply of primary care physicians by supporting educational loan repayment and financial incentives for recruitment” and later explained in its report:

[O]ther strategies to improve recruitment and retention of physicians from outside Alaska must be considered. Support-for-Service programs offer an important recruitment and retention tool for states. These programs provide current or future health practitioners with educational scholarships, educational loans, repayment of educational loans, or direct monetary incentives in return for a contractual obligation with the practitioner to serve a period of service in a needy area.

Loan repayment and financial incentive programs are the most popular form of support-for-service programs, as studies document service obligations established at the beginning of a practitioner’s educational process (through a scholarship or loan) are less effective in terms of achieving the desired recruitment outcome as are loan repayment and financial incentive programs. Another benefit of loan repayment and financial incentive programs is that the return is immediate.

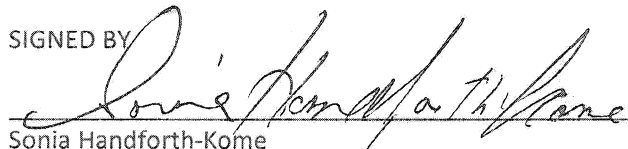
WHEREAS Having experienced providers on staff helps overall retention and recruitment, and many providers are reaching retirement age with no current incentives in place to keep these providers in the workforce beyond retirement age; and

WHEREAS federal health reform law permits state funding used for loan repayment to be tax exempt;

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska Primary Care Association supports the creation of a state-sponsored “Health Care Professionals Incentive Program,” and recommends that the program include a provision that will allow incentives used for loan repayment to be tax exempt, and will advocate for the necessary authorizing and fiduciary legislation.

DONE AND DATED THE 16th DAY OF September IN THE YEAR 2010

SIGNED BY



Sonia Handforth-Kome

Board President, Alaska Primary Care Association



¹ Alaska Health Workforce Vacancy Study Research Summary. University of Alaska. August 2007. http://nursing.uaa.alaska.edu/acrh/index_downloads/workforce-summary_final.pdf.

² US Department of Human Services, Health Resources and Service Administration. Health Professional Shortage Area. <http://hpsafind.hrsa.gov/>.

³ Health Care Professions Loan Repayment Program Concept Proposal. Pat Carr, Chief Health Planning & Systems Development, Alaska DHSS. September 11, 2007. <http://www.hss.state.ak.us/primarycare/assets/loan-proposal.pdf>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.