

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Senator David Wilson

SENATE BILL 93: MEDICAL PROVIDER INCENTIVES/LOAN REPAYMENT

"An Act relating to a workforce enhancement program for health care professionals employed in the state; and providing for an effective date."

SPONSOR STATEMENT

Urban and rural Alaskan communities face a serious shortage of healthcare providers. If not immediately addressed, this shortage will rapidly worsen.

Senate Bill 93 builds upon successes of the Alaska Health Care Professions Loan Repayment and Incentive Program, commonly referred to as the SHARP Program. Established in 2012, SHARP is a loan repayment and direct monetary incentive program that helps reduce shortages by filling vacant healthcare provider positions in some of the most underserved areas across the state. SHARP I and SHARP II leveraged federal, state, Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority, and employer funding, with a focus on rural, remote, and safety net providers. To date, the program, which is administered by the Department of Health and Social Services, has supported more than 250 practitioners in nearly 60 sites across the state.

SHARP III fills the gap between the Federally funded SHARP I program and the State-funded SHARP II program by allowing private sponsorship in the form of local government, philanthropic foundation or employer support. SHARP III focuses on private-public partnerships, recruitment, and retention, by offering incentives to new and experienced professionals who may have exhausted other loan repayment options or who no longer carry educational loan debt. These professionals must meet eligibility criteria and be engaged in qualified employment. The program does not require any state general funds; user fees cover the cost of program administration.

SHARP III is a budget-neutral initiative that addresses service shortages in our current healthcare landscape, leverages community-level investment across the state, and improves health outcomes of Alaskans. I encourage your support of this legislation.