

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2024

A N A C T

RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- THE MEDICAL PRIMARY CARE
SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Introduced By: Senators Lauria, Ruggerio, Pearson, DiMario, Miller, and Lawson

Date Introduced: March 05, 2024

Referred To: Senate Finance

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. The general assembly hereby makes the following findings of fact:

2 (1) Primary care healthcare in the State of Rhode Island is in crisis.

3 (2) There currently exists a national and regional shortage of primary care healthcare
4 providers.

5 (3) Many primary care healthcare providers are retiring early and many more are
6 approaching retirement age.

7 (4) Primary care healthcare is provided by physicians, nurse practitioners and physician
8 assistants and the overall numbers of medical professionals entering the field of primary care
9 healthcare is declining.

10 (5) It is increasingly difficult for primary care practices to hire nurses, medical assistants,
11 behavioral health clinicians and other key staff, which is leading to even higher burnout among
12 primary care providers.

13 (6) Fewer students are going into primary care as a profession due to lower salaries, high
14 student loans and increasing administrative burden leading to provider burnout.

15 (7) Our aging Rhode Island population requires more medical care.

16 (8) As a state, we must recruit, train, retain and sustain the number of primary care
17 providers sufficient to meet the population health needs of all Rhode Islanders.

18 (9) Investments in primary care are essential for access to health services, improving the

1 health of the population and reducing overall healthcare costs.

2 SECTION 2. Title 23 of the General Laws entitled "HEALTH AND SAFETY" is hereby
3 amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

4 CHAPTER 1.12

5 THE MEDICAL PRIMARY CARE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

6 **23-1.12-1. Short title.**

7 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the "The Medical Primary Care
8 Scholarship Program".

9 **23-1.12-2. Establishment of scholarship program.**

10 There is hereby established the medical primary care scholarship program to be
11 administered by the commissioner of postsecondary education in consultation with the director of
12 the department of health.

13 **23-1.12-3. Definitions.**

14 When used in this chapter, the following words are construed as follows:

15 (1) "Commissioner" means the commissioner of postsecondary education appointed
16 pursuant to the provisions of § 16-59-6.

17 (2) "Director" means the director of health holding office pursuant to the provisions of §§
18 42-6-9 and 42-6-10.

19 (3) "Primary care" means healthcare services that cover a range of prevention, wellness
20 and treatment for common illnesses and injuries. Primary care includes patients making an initial
21 approach to a healthcare professional for treatment as well as long-term relationships established
22 between a patient and a healthcare professional and may include family medicine or medical care,
23 general internal medicine or medical care, and general medical practice.

24 (4) "Scholarship program" means the medical primary care scholarship program
25 established pursuant to § 23-1.12-2.

26 **23-1.12-4. Powers.**

27 The commissioner in consultation with the director is authorized and empowered:

28 (1) To adopt rules and regulations designed to implement the provisions of this chapter;

29 (2) To adopt selection criteria, consistent with the provisions of this chapter to include, but
30 not be limited to:

31 (i) Identification of exemplary scholars seeking to serve as a medical professional;

32 (ii) Identification of scholars demonstrating a strong desire to establish and work in the
33 primary care healthcare area;

34 (iii) Identification of scholars who have a demonstrated connection to or desire to establish

1 a long-term professional commitment to serving as a primary care provider in the State of Rhode
2 Island; and

3 (iv) Identification of scholars to match the diversity of Rhode Island's population;

4 (3) To establish, if the commissioner deems it advisable, a nonprofit organization registered
5 with the secretary of state, as the entity to administer and operate all administrative program
6 services to be operated under the direct supervision of the commissioner;

7 (4) To establish an application procedure for scholarship consideration and awarding of
8 scholarships;

9 (5) To supervise the disbursement of the scholarship fund; and

10 (6) To perform all other acts necessary to carry out the intent, purpose and provisions of
11 this chapter.

12 **23-1.12-5. Eligibility for medical school scholarship.**

13 To be eligible for medical school scholarship consideration, an applicant shall:

14 (1) Complete the application procedure established by the commissioner;

15 (2) Be graduating or having graduated from an accredited college or university;

16 (3) Have an established record of excellent academic standing;

17 (4) Have been accepted for admission in a medical school in the United States;

18 (5) Comply with all requirements and conditions of the scholarship program and the
19 provisions of this chapter.

20 **23-1.12-6. Eligibility for nurse practitioner or physician assistant scholarship.**

21 To be eligible for a scholarship for attendance at a nurse practitioner or physician assistant
22 educational training institution or program, an applicant shall:

23 (1) Complete the application procedure established by the commissioner;

24 (2) Have completed all educational requirements for admission to the nurse practitioner or
25 physician assistant educational training program;

26 (3) Have an established record of excellent academic standing;

27 (4) Have been accepted for admission in a degree or educational training program located
28 in the United States for nurse practitioners or physician assistants; and

29 (5) Comply with all requirements and conditions of the program established pursuant to
30 the provisions of this chapter.

31 **23-1.12-7. Award of scholarship - Conditions.**

32 (a) At any time that sufficient funds become available, the commissioner may award up to
33 five (5) new medical school scholarships per academic year, five (5) new nurse practitioner
34 scholarships per academic year, and five (5) new physician assistant scholarships per academic

1 year.

2 (b) Any medical school scholarship awarded shall continue for a period of four (4) years
3 and any nurse practitioner or physician assistant scholarship shall continue for a period of two (2)
4 years; provided the recipient maintains good academic standing and continues to comply with all
5 rules, regulations and conditions of the scholarship program.

6 (c) The maximum award for a recipient of the medical school scholarship shall be seventy
7 thousand dollars (\$70,000) per academic year.

8 (d) The maximum award for a recipient of the nurse practitioner or the physician assistant
9 scholarship shall be forty seven thousand dollars (\$47,000) per academic year.

10 (e) All recipients for scholarship funds shall execute a contract agreeing to work in Rhode
11 Island providing primary care healthcare services upon completion of their respective education,
12 licensing and any applicable internship. In addition to the contract, each recipient shall sign a
13 promissory note for all funds received from the scholarship program. The contract and promissory
14 note shall be prepared by the commissioner in consultation with the attorney general.

15 (f) Every contract shall be negotiated and approved pursuant to the provisions of § 42-11-
16 11.

17 **23-1.12-8. Contract and promissory note.**

18 (a) Every recipient of scholarship funds pursuant to the provisions of this chapter shall
19 execute a contract negotiated and approved pursuant to § 42-11-11, and a promissory note prior to
20 the receipt of any funds.

21 (b) The contract shall require the recipient to:

22 (1) Attend full-time the specified academic institution or educational program which shall
23 qualify the recipient to provide primary care healthcare services;

24 (2) Maintain academic good standing;

25 (3) Graduate on time for a full-time student attending the academic institution or program;

26 and

27 (4) Agree upon graduation and licensing to provide two (2) years of full-time work
28 providing primary care health services in the State of Rhode Island for each year a scholarship
29 award was received.

30 (c) The contract shall provide that for every two (2) year period that the scholarship
31 recipient following graduation works full-time in the State of Rhode Island providing primary care
32 healthcare services, then the amount of the scholarship award received by the recipient for one
33 academic year shall be forgiven and cancelled. If the recipient has received the maximum
34 scholarship award over four (4) academic years then upon eight (8) years of working full-time in

1 Rhode Island providing primary care healthcare services then all scholarship funds received shall
2 be forgiven and the promissory note cancelled.

3 **23-1.12-9. Repayment of funds.**

4 (a) Any recipient of scholarship funds who fails to comply with the rules or regulations
5 promulgated pursuant to § 23-1.12-3, the provisions of this chapter or the terms of the contract for
6 receipt of funds shall immediately pay and return all funds received to the commissioner.

7 (b) All scholarship funds shall be repaid to the commissioner if:

8 (1) The student fails to complete the educational program;

9 (2) The student fails to comply with the provisions of subsection (a) of this section; or

10 (3) The student fails to work full-time providing primary care healthcare services in the
11 State of Rhode Island for any of the required contract period of time following graduation and
12 licensing.

13 (c) Partial scholarship funds shall be repaid to the commissioner should the recipient
14 partially fulfill the contract obligation but fails to work two (2) years providing full-time primary
15 care healthcare service in Rhode Island for every year scholarship funds were received. The
16 reimbursement shall be pro-rated for qualified time working applied to the gross amount received
17 by the recipient.

18 (d) Interest shall accrue on all funds owed by the recipient pursuant to the provisions of §
19 9-21-10.

20 (e) The attorney general is authorized and empowered to bring proceedings to recover all
21 amounts due under the provisions of this section.

22 (f) All sums recovered pursuant to the provisions of this section shall be redeposited in the
23 restricted receipt account to implement the scholarship program.

24 **23-1.12-10. Appropriations.**

25 (a) For the fiscal year beginning July 1, 2024, there is hereby appropriated, out of money
26 in the treasury not otherwise appropriated, the sum of three million, five hundred eighty thousand
27 dollars (\$3,580,000) deposited into a restricted receipt account to implement the scholarship
28 program established in § 23-1.12-2; and the state controller is hereby authorized and directed to
29 draw to the controller's orders upon the general treasurer for payment of said sum, or so much
30 thereof as may be from time to time required, upon the receipt by the general treasurer of properly
31 authenticated vouchers submitted by the commissioner on an annual basis over a minimum period
32 of four (4) years.

33 (b) For fiscal year 2025-2026, and each fiscal year thereafter, the general assembly shall
34 annually appropriate a sum as it may deem necessary to carry out the purposes of this chapter, and

1 the state controller is hereby authorized and directed to draw the controller's orders upon the general
2 treasurer for the payment of the sum or sums or so much thereof as may be required from time to
3 time to be deposited in a restricted receipt account upon receipt by the general treasurer of properly
4 authenticated vouchers submitted by the commissioner.

5 **23-1.12-11. Audits.**

6 (a) The commissioner shall submit annually all financial records and receipts of
7 disbursements to the auditor general and the director of administration.

8 (b) The auditor general and the director of administration are authorized to review and audit
9 all records, receipts, disbursements and transactions concerning the scholarship program and the
10 funds associated with the scholarship program.

11 **23-1.12-12. Reports.**

12 The commissioner shall report annually to the general assembly and the governor no later
13 than December 31 of each year on the status and progress of the scholarship program established
14 and administered pursuant to the provisions of this chapter.

15 **23-1.12-13. Severability.**

16 If any provision of this chapter or any rule or regulation promulgated pursuant to the
17 provisions of this chapter, or its application to any person or circumstance, is held invalid by a court
18 of competent jurisdiction, the remainder of the chapter, rule or regulation and the application of the
19 provision to other persons or circumstances shall not be affected by its invalidity. The invalidity of
20 any section or sections or portion of any section or sections of this chapter shall not affect the
21 validity of the remainder of this chapter.

22 SECTION 3. This act shall take effect on July 1, 2024.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

A N A C T

RELATING TO HEALTH AND SAFETY -- THE MEDICAL PRIMARY CARE
SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

1 This act would establish the medical primary care scholarship program to be administered
2 by the commissioner of postsecondary education. This act would appropriate three million, five
3 hundred eighty thousand dollars (\$3,580,000) which would be utilized to provide scholarships for
4 four (4) years for doctors, and for two (2) years for physician assistants and nurse practitioners to
5 provide primary care services in Rhode Island. For every year a medical practitioner received a
6 scholarship the recipient would be required to provide two (2) years of work in the field of primary
7 care in the state upon graduation.

8 This act would take effect on July 1, 2024.

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