

Public Health Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6979

AN ACT CONCERNING THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH'S

Title: RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING PHYSICIAN RECRUITMENT.

Vote Date: 3/5/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable

PH Date: 2/26/2025

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Public Health Committee.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill allows retired physicians to renew their licenses with reduced requirements, to apply for reinstatement of their license, and exempts physicians from professional liability insurance requirements when providing volunteer behavioral health services at non-profit clinics where access is free. Finally, the bill requires the Department of Public Health (DPH) to establish a student loan repayment program for providers who work in our state's behavioral health services provided there are available resources.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Manisha Juthani, MD, Commissioner, DPH:

This bill addresses two different policy areas. The first is creating a retired physician license, and the second is reconstituting the authorizing language for a student loan repayment program. The new physician license will allow physicians towards the end of their career to continue to provide pro bono care on a limited license and tasks DPH with developing regulations for the new license. Section 3 allows physicians that have already allowed their license to lapse to obtain a retired physician license without first having to reinstate their regular physician license. Regarding the second issue, DPH currently runs a student loan repayment program using a combination of ARPA and Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) funds. It is important to note that funding through HRSA in the future will require a state match.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA):

Section 5 of HB 6979 would contribute to the "all-hands-on-deck" approach needed to meet the employment demands in the healthcare field. CHA supports this effort and encourages the committee to advance the legislation. We encourage the committee to review the Comptroller's 2025 Healthcare Cabinet Report and its workforce recommendations. CHA supports the report's recommendations, which, complementary to this bill, call for providing tuition repayment and loan repayment for individuals pursuing careers in healthcare.

Connecticut State Medical Society:

This bill is an important step in addressing this multifaceted problem of physician retention. The retired physician license is a welcome addition that will allow experienced physicians to continue contributing to patient care in a limited capacity. However, we must recognize that this alone will not address the fundamental recruitment and retention issues for early and mid-career physicians. Its impact will be limited unless it is expanded beyond primary care and behavioral health to include all specialties, many of which are facing shortages in Connecticut. The bill should be enhanced to recognize this broader need.

Dr. George Kuchel, Director, University of Connecticut (UConn) Center on Aging:

There is a profound national shortage of geriatricians which includes Connecticut with positions remaining unfilled for years. Dr. Kuchel strongly urges support of HB 6979, especially the sections which will require DPH to establish a student loan repayment program for health care providers and requests the committee to consider adding geriatric medicine to the program.

Others in support of the bill:

- Caitlin McAvoy, LCSW, Sky Meadow Counseling LLC
- Laura Prior MSN, APRN, ACNP-BC, Health Policy Chair, CT APRN Society
- Steven Thornquist, MD, Connecticut Society of Eye Physicians
- Kenneth Dock Fox, APRN

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Dave Rackliffe, Asst. Clerk

Date: March 7, 2025