

Public Health Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-1450

AN ACT CONCERNING RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION OF THE HEALTH

Title: CARE WORKFORCE.

Vote Date: 3/21/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/10/2025

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

The Public Health Committee.

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill would create several initiatives designed to attract and retain healthcare professionals in Connecticut. The bill requires the Department of Public Health (DPH) to do the following:

- Establish a health care provider loan reimbursement program for providers who are employed full time in the state.
- Develop eligibility requirements for recipients of these loan reimbursement grants including income guidelines as well as healthcare workforce shortages areas.
- Award not less than twenty per cent of these loan reimbursement grants to individuals employed full-time as primary care providers.
- Award at least twenty per cent of these loan reimbursement grants to individuals employed full-time as health care providers in a rural community or in a Federally Qualified Health Clinic (FQHC).
- Reimbursement are to be annual in amounts determined by DPH.
- Allows DPH to accept outside funds for the program.
- Does not require applicant employer's to be a non-profit.
- Requires DPH to establish, by January 1, 2026, a virtual education program to provide home-based virtual education to persons seeking certification as a nurse's aide or Emergency Medical Technician (EMT).

The bill also requires the education commissioner to add radiologic technology, nuclear medicine, and respiratory care to promote health care career options to middle and high school students.

Substitute language does the following:

- Adds PAs to section. 2.
- Removes the virtual training section due to federal and state law issues.
- Removes the provision regarding smoke detectors,
- Adds grants for relocating rural athletic trainers,
- Adds radiologic technicians to the list of professions listed in the State Department of Education (SDE) plan for promotion of health care professions as career options for middle and high school students.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Manisha Juthani, MD, Commissioner, Department of Public Health (DPH):

Sections 1 and 2 of SB 1450 gives DPH the authority to implement and raise funds for a student loan repayment program for health professionals. Similar language is in HB 6979 which passed out of committee. DPH will work with the committee to reconcile any differences in the language of both bills. Regarding section 3, Nurse's Aide and Emergency Medical Technician training program requirements are currently defined in state laws and regulations.

In addition, Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) are certified through the DPH after successfully completing requirements. An entirely virtual EMT training course would not be ideal for the following reasons:

- Current laws for EMT certification require completion of an initial training program consistent with the National Emergency Medical Services Education Standards.
- The current version of those standards, as stated by NHTSA and approved by the department, requires actual hands-on skills development and entry level competence.
- The bill creates a virtual education program which does not provide practical training in a laboratory or clinical setting that would assess competency.

Sean Scanlon, Comptroller, State of Connecticut:

By passing SB 1450, we will be sending a strong message to our state's healthcare workers that their government values their contributions and will do whatever it can to support their work. Creating a student loan program will retain our current healthcare workers while helping to recruit more of them.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

John Brady, Executive Vice President, American Federation of Teachers Connecticut (AFTCT):

Anything that aids the recruitment and retention of healthcare workers is very important and this bill does this. I would suggest defining "full time", as it is used differently in different settings. I would suggest defining it as "32 scheduled hours or more per week", as that is common for many institutions which sometimes do not offer 40 hours per week. I would also suggest that the need for clinical hours is of utmost importance and further suggest that the same number of clinical hours now required to be certified as a Certified Nurse's Aide (CAN) or Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) be maintained.

Kathleen Silard, Stamford Health:

Stamford Health applauds the work the legislature has already done to provide student loan relief for healthcare workers including the 2024 launch of the Connecticut Student Loan Repayment Program. We support the intent of this bill to provide additional tuition relief and ways to incentivize the growth of health care workers in the state.

Deb Polun, Chief Strategy Officer, Community Health Center Association of Connecticut (CHCACT):

Over the years, the state and federal governments have attempted to address the high cost of medical school, dental school, and other training programs through loan repayment opportunities. Under the National Health Services Corp (NHSC), these providers work in underserved areas, including health centers, in exchange for repayment of some of their school loans. We support section 1 of this bill which would allow the Student Loan Repayment Program (SLRP) to continue, and we ask you to support funding in the state budget as well.

Ben Shaiken, Director of Government Relations, The Alliance:

The bill aims to expand student loan reimbursement options for healthcare professionals in our state. We urge the committee to expand the preference provided in the bill for federally qualified health centers to include all licensed health care professionals in community-based settings, including behavioral health professionals, employed by nonprofit providers in Connecticut.

Others in Support of This Bill

- Sandra Ferreira-Molina, Policy and Advocacy Director, Connecticut Oral Health Initiative (COHI).
- Ashley Weiss, Connecticut Society for Respiratory Care (CtSRC).
- Cristher Estrada-Perez, Executive Director, Student Loan Fund.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Jason Prevelige, Chairman of the Legislative Committee, Connecticut Academy of Physician Associates (CONNAPA):

ConnAPA stands in opposition to the current language of the bill but would fully support it with an amendment. Section 2 line 39 does not include physicians' assistants (PAs) from a carveout that prohibits any requirement for physicians and advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs) to work for a not-for-profit employer to be eligible for a state program. Physicians, (PAs) and APRNs are typically employed together by the same medical groups. Given the cost of education for a PA, it is important to ensure that any programs created or offered are equitable in how they are administered.

Tracy Wodatch, President and CEO, Connecticut Association for Healthcare at Home:

Given our extensive experience and involvement in discussions regarding caregiver safety, the Association is utterly baffled by the provisions of section 4 of this bill. To assign the responsibility of installing smoke detectors to the caregiver and the agency is unreasonable, unfair. This proposal forces agency employees to assume basic homeowner/landlord responsibilities far outside the scope of their profession. When considering logistical challenges, liability concerns, and prevalent workforce shortages, this proposal is as unreasonable as it is unfeasible. We urge you to remove section 4 of this bill.

Jennifer LeDuc, RN MSN, Director of Quality & Operations, Day Kimball Homecare and Hospice:

Ms. Leduc strongly oppose section 4 of this bill. While the bill's overall intent is commendable, requiring home health and hospice agencies to ensure homes are equipped with smoke detectors, and if not, arranging for their installation, is both misplaced and overreaching. It does nothing to recruit or retain our workforce. Instead, it exacerbates existing workforce challenges. Ensuring working smoke detectors in private residences is simply not our responsibility. This mandate inappropriately shifts liability to home health providers, detracting from our primary focus which is delivering medical and supportive in-home care.

Others in Opposition to This Bill:

- Kim Sandor, MSN, RN, FNP Executive Director, CT Nurses' Association.
- Shannon E. Sanford, RN, Associate Professor of Nursing, CT State Community College Gateway Campus.
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Reported by: Dave Rackliffe, Assistant Clerk

Date: March 25, 2025