

House Bill 733

By: Representatives Alexander of the 66<sup>th</sup>, Cooper of the 43<sup>rd</sup>, Dempsey of the 13<sup>th</sup>, Silcox of the 52<sup>nd</sup>, Hatchett of the 150<sup>th</sup>, and others

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED  
AN ACT

1 To amend Chapter 34 of Title 31 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to  
2 medical professionals for rural areas assistance, so as to expand the service cancelable loan  
3 program for certain health professionals in underserved rural areas to psychiatrists in areas  
4 that are lacking in mental health services; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting  
5 laws; and for other purposes.

6 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

7 **SECTION 1.**

8 Chapter 34 of Title 31 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to medical  
9 professionals for rural areas assistance, is amended by revising Code Section 31-34-1,  
10 relating to the short title, as follows:

11 "31-34-1.

12 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the 'Physicians, Dentists, Physician  
13 Assistants, ~~and~~ Advanced Practice Registered Nurses, and Psychiatrists for Rural Areas  
14 Assistance Act.'

15 **SECTION 2.**

16 Said chapter is further amended by revising Code Section 31-34-2, relating to the purpose  
17 and intent of the chapter, as follows:

18 "31-34-2.

19 It is the purpose of this chapter to increase the number of physicians, dentists, physician  
20 assistants, and advanced practice registered nurses in medically underserved rural areas of  
21 Georgia and to increase the number of psychiatrists in rural areas of Georgia that are  
22 underserved with regard to mental health services by making loans to physicians, dentists,  
23 physician assistants, ~~and~~ advanced practice registered nurses, and psychiatrists who have  
24 completed their medical or health care education and allowing such loans to be repaid by  
25 such physicians, dentists, physician assistants, ~~and~~ advanced practice registered nurses, and

26 psychiatrists agreeing to practice medicine or provide health care services or mental health  
 27 care services in such rural areas and by making grants to hospitals and, as determined by  
 28 the Georgia Board for Physician Workforce, other health care entities, local governments,  
 29 and civic organizations in underserved rural areas of Georgia that agree to provide  
 30 matching funds to the grant, with the intent to enhance recruitment efforts in bringing  
 31 physicians, dentists, physician assistants, ~~and~~ advanced practice registered nurses, and  
 32 psychiatrists to such areas. It is the intent of the General Assembly that if funds are  
 33 available to the Georgia Board for Physician Workforce to make loans, grants, or  
 34 scholarships under this chapter or under other applicable state law, the Georgia Board for  
 35 Physician Workforce shall give priority to loans and scholarships under Part 6 of Article  
 36 7 of Chapter 3 of Title 20 and to loans under Code Section 31-34-4."

37

### SECTION 3.

38 Said chapter is further amended by revising subsections (a) and (c) of Code Section 31-34-4,  
 39 relating to loan applicant qualifications and rules and regulations, as follows:

40 "31-34-4.

41 (a) A physician, dentist, physician assistant, ~~or~~ advanced practice registered nurse, or  
 42 psychiatrist who receives a loan under the program provided for in this chapter shall be a  
 43 citizen or national of the United States licensed to practice his or her health care profession  
 44 within the State of Georgia at the time the loan is made, and shall be a graduate of an  
 45 accredited graduate medical education program or other applicable accredited health care  
 46 education program located in the United States which has received accreditation or  
 47 provisional accreditation by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education or  
 48 the American Osteopathic Association or such other applicable accreditation for other  
 49 health care education programs, as determined by the board."

50 "(c) The board is authorized to consider among other criteria for granting loans under the  
 51 provisions of this chapter the state residency status and home area of the applying  
 52 physician, dentist, physician assistant, ~~or~~ advanced practice registered nurse, or psychiatrist  
 53 and to give priority to those applicants who are physicians, dentists, physician assistants,  
 54 ~~and~~ advanced practice registered nurses, and psychiatrists actively practicing or beginning  
 55 active practice in specialties, including mental health care, experiencing shortages or  
 56 distribution problems in rural areas of this state as determined by the board pursuant to  
 57 rules and regulations adopted by it in accordance with this chapter."

58 **SECTION 4.**

59 Said chapter is further amended by revising subsections (a) and (b) of Code  
60 Section 31-34-4.1, relating to grants to hospitals and other entities, use of funds, and rules  
61 and regulations authorized, as follows:

62 "(a) After providing priority consideration to granting loans pursuant to Code Section  
63 31-34-4, the board is authorized to make grants to hospitals and, as determined by the  
64 board, other health care entities, local governments, and civic organizations in underserved  
65 rural areas of Georgia, provided that any such hospital, health care entity, local  
66 government, or civic organization matches such grant in an amount not less than such  
67 grant. Such grants shall be for the purpose of enhancing recruitment efforts in bringing  
68 physicians, dentists, physician assistants, ~~and~~ advanced practice registered nurses, and  
69 psychiatrists to such areas.

70 (b) Acceptable expenditures of grant funds by a hospital or other health care entity, local  
71 government, or civic organization include, but are not limited to, medical or health care  
72 education loan repayment, salary supplements for physicians, dentists, physician assistants,  
73 ~~and~~ advanced practice registered nurses, and psychiatrists, and additional support staff for  
74 a physician's, dentist's, physician assistant's, ~~or~~ advanced practice registered nurse's, or  
75 psychiatrist's office. Grant funds shall not be used for hiring or paying a recruiting firm or  
76 individual recruiter."

77 **SECTION 5.**

78 Said chapter is further amended by revising Code Section 31-34-5, relating to service  
79 cancelable loans, amount, repayment, and determination of underserved rural areas, as  
80 follows:

81 "31-34-5.

82 (a)(1) The board shall have the authority to grant to each applicant approved by the board  
83 on a one-year renewable basis a service cancelable loan for a period not exceeding four  
84 years. The amount of the loan shall be determined by the board, but such amount shall  
85 be related to the applicant's outstanding obligations incurred as a direct result of  
86 completing medical or health care education and training.

87 (2) A loan or loans to each approved applicant shall be granted on the condition that the  
88 full amount of the loan or loans shall be repaid to the State of Georgia in services to be  
89 rendered by the applicant's practicing his or her profession in a board approved physician,  
90 dentist, physician assistant, ~~or~~ advanced practice registered nurse, or psychiatrist  
91 underserved rural area of Georgia. For each full year of practicing his or her profession  
92 in such underserved rural area, the physician, dentist, physician assistant, ~~or~~ advanced

93 practice registered nurse, or psychiatrist who obtained the loan shall receive credit for the  
 94 full amount of one year's loan plus regular interest which accrued on such amount.

95 (b)(1) The board shall have the authority to make grants to each applicant hospital or  
 96 other health care entity, local government, or civic organization approved by the board  
 97 on a yearly basis, renewable each year at the discretion of the board. The amount of the  
 98 grant shall be determined by the board, but such amount shall be related to and shall not  
 99 exceed the applicant's proposed expenditures to enhance recruitment efforts in bringing  
 100 one or more physicians, dentists, physician assistants, ~~or~~ advanced practice registered  
 101 nurses, or psychiatrists to the underserved rural area.

102 (2) A grant to an approved applicant shall be made on any condition or conditions  
 103 determined by the board, which may include, but not be limited to, that one or more  
 104 physicians, dentists, physician assistants, ~~or~~ advanced practice registered nurses, or  
 105 psychiatrists are employed and retained in the underserved rural area for a prescribed  
 106 minimum length of time.

107 (c) In making a determination of physician, dentist, physician assistant, ~~or~~ advanced  
 108 practice registered nurse, or psychiatrist underserved rural areas of Georgia, the board shall  
 109 seek the advice and assistance of the Department of Public Health, the University of  
 110 Georgia Cooperative Extension Service, the Department of Community Affairs, and such  
 111 other public or private associations or organizations as the board determines to be of  
 112 assistance in making such determinations. Criteria to determine physician, dentist,  
 113 physician assistant, ~~or~~ advanced practice registered nurse, or psychiatrist underserved rural  
 114 areas shall include, but shall not be limited to, relevant statistical data related to the  
 115 following:

116 (1) The ratio of physicians, dentists, physician assistants, ~~or~~ advanced practice registered  
 117 nurses, or psychiatrists to population in the area;

118 (2) Indications of the health status of the population in the area;

119 (3) The poverty level and dependent age groups of the population in the area;

120 (4) Indications of community support for more physicians, dentists, physician assistants,  
 121 ~~or~~ advanced practice registered nurses, or psychiatrists in the area; and

122 (5) Indications that access to the physician's, dentist's, physician assistant's, ~~or~~ advanced  
 123 practice registered nurse's, or psychiatrist's services is available to every person in the  
 124 underserved area regardless of ability to pay."

## 125 SECTION 6.

126 Said chapter is further amended by revising Code Section 31-34-9, relating to biennial report  
 127 to the General Assembly, as follows:

128 "31-34-9.  
129 The board shall make a biennial report to the General Assembly of its activities under the  
130 provisions of this chapter. Such report shall include the name of each recipient of a loan  
131 made under the provisions of this chapter, the amount of each such loan, and the rural area  
132 in which the recipient is practicing medicine or providing other health care services or  
133 providing mental health services. Such report shall include the name of each recipient of  
134 a grant made under the provisions of this chapter, the amount of each such grant, and the  
135 rural area in which the recipient is located. Such report shall also report the amount of  
136 administrative expenses incurred by the board in carrying out the provisions of this  
137 chapter."

138 **SECTION 7.**

139 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.