

2024 -- H 8078

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LC005686
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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2024

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A N A C T

RELATING TO STATE AFFAIRS AND GOVERNMENT -- THE LADDERS TO
LICENSURE PROGRAM

Introduced By: Representatives Tanzi, Fogarty, Felix, Shallcross Smith, Ajello, J.
Lombardi, Hull, Ackerman, McNamara, and Kislak

Date Introduced: March 15, 2024

Referred To: House Finance

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Legislative findings.

2 The general assembly hereby finds that:

3 (1) Rhode Island is experiencing workforce shortages across health and human services,
4 the state's largest employment sector, with a projected sixty-seven thousand five hundred (67,500)
5 open health and related social assistance positions between 2020 and 2030;

6 (2) There is a current and projected shortage of licensed health professionals including
7 registered nurses, licensed practical nurses, nurse practitioners, social workers, mental health
8 counselors, marriage and family therapists and post-secondary healthcare educators;

9 (3) The licensed health professional workforce is declining due to age and burnout;

10 (4) The number of applications to most health professional higher education programs is
11 declining;

12 (5) The current healthcare provider shortage has reduced timely access to quality patient
13 care and contributes to increased healthcare costs, factors that will be exacerbated over time;

14 (6) The high turnover among paraprofessional healthcare workers is attributable in part to
15 limited career advancement opportunities;

16 (7) The current health professional workforce does not reflect the racial, ethnic, linguistic
17 and cultural diversity of the population it serves which adversely impacts health outcomes;

18 (8) The paraprofessional healthcare workforce is significantly more racially, ethnically,

1 culturally and linguistical diverse than the licensed health professional workforce;

2 (9) Advancement of the paraprofessional workforce will increase the diversity of the
3 licensed health professional workforce;

4 (10) Improving the supply and diversity of the health professional workforce will require
5 removing historical and ongoing barriers to training and education among underrepresented groups
6 and establishing innovative public-private partnerships among healthcare providers, educators and
7 state agencies; and

8 (11) The executive office of health and human services in partnership with the office of the
9 postsecondary commissioner has successfully piloted the health professional equity initiative using
10 one-time ARPA funds to support over one hundred (100) healthcare paraprofessionals from diverse
11 backgrounds to pursue a higher education degree and health professional license in behavioral
12 health and nursing careers.

13 SECTION 2. Title 42 of the General Laws entitled "STATE AFFAIRS AND
14 GOVERNMENT" is hereby amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

15 CHAPTER 166

16 THE LADDERS TO LICENSURE PROGRAM

17 **42-166-1. The ladders to licensure grant program.**

18 The executive office of health and human services is hereby directed to establish the ladders
19 to licensure grant program, a public-private partnership to:

20 (1) Increase the number of licensed health professionals;

21 (2) Increase racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity of health professionals;

22 (3) Provide academic, financial and wrap around supports to enable working adults to
23 obtain health professional higher education degrees and license;

24 (4) Leverage employer support for academic, financial and wraparound supports;

25 (5) Align with existing state workforce and higher education initiatives;

26 (6) Develop and implement career ladders with tiered training and education requirements
27 and corresponding salary increases;

28 (7) Develop and implement interscholastic and interdepartmental agreements that accept
29 prior learning, credentials, work experience, and academic credits towards requirement for higher
30 education health professional degrees;

31 (8) Establish policies and initiatives to counter systemic racism and other institutional
32 barriers to participation and advancement of underrepresented populations;

33 (9) Establish policies and initiatives that provide flexible scheduling of work hours and/or
34 academic programs to reduce barriers to participation; and

1 (10) Identify state policy barriers to entry and advancement in the field.

2 **42-166-2. Appropriation.**

3 There is hereby appropriated to the executive office of health and human services the sum
4 of one million dollars (\$1,000,000) for fiscal year 2025 to support the first year of this three (3)
5 year initiative. These funds shall be used to provide grants to three (3) or four (4) grantee
6 partnerships, consisting of multiple private sector health and human services employer
7 organizations and public education grantee partnerships (with at least one focused on behavioral
8 health and one focused on nursing). Employers will be required to contribute a twenty-five percent
9 (25%) in-kind match and a ten percent (10%) cash match.

10 **42-166-3. Oversight.**

11 The executive office of health and human services shall collaborate and coordinate with
12 the department of labor and training and the office of the postsecondary commissioner in the
13 development, implementation and oversight of the program.

14 **42-166-4. Reporting.**

15 The executive office of health and human services shall provide quarterly reports to the
16 speaker of the house of representatives and senate president documenting the progress of the
17 implementation of the program.

18 SECTION 3. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
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1 This act would direct the executive office of health and human services (EOHHS), in
2 conjunction with the department of labor and training (DLT) and the office of the postsecondary
3 commissioner, to implement a grant program to fund public or private partnerships that provide
4 opportunities for healthcare paraprofessionals to pursue higher education degrees and health
5 professional licensure. This program would increase the diversity of the health professional
6 workforce.

7 This act would take effect upon passage.

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