

HOUSE BILL 2458

By Sherrell

AN ACT to amend Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49 and Title 63, relative to incentivizing physician assistants to provide health services in underserved areas.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE:

SECTION 1. Tennessee Code Annotated, Title 49, Chapter 4, Part 7, is amended by adding the following as a new section:

(a) As used in this section, "health resource shortage area" means an area determined to be a health resource shortage area by the department of health, office of rural health.

(b) Subject to specific appropriation of funds by the general assembly, there is created a physician assistant student loan repayment grant program to incentivize physician assistants to provide health services in health resource shortage areas following completion of their educational program.

(c) To be eligible for a physician assistant student loan repayment grant, a person must:

(1) Have successfully completed a physician assistant educational program accredited by the Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant, Inc., or its successor accrediting agency;

(2) Meet all qualification and licensure requirements for physician assistants under § 63-19-105;

(3) Apply to the department of health for a grant, on forms provided by the department; and

(4) Enter into a contract with the department to provide health services in a health resource shortage area for at least five (5) years.

(d) The department of health shall administer the physician assistant student loan repayment program. The department, in consultation with the Tennessee student assistance corporation and the board of physician assistants, is authorized to promulgate rules for the management and administration of the physician assistant student loan repayment program. The rules must be promulgated in accordance with the Uniform Administrative Procedures Act, compiled in title 4, chapter 5.

(e)

(1) The department shall issue program monies to pay physician assistant student loan repayment grants to grant recipients for the amount of principal, interest, and related expenses of the physician assistant's educational loans, not to exceed the recipient's total student loan indebtedness.

(2) Subject to the appropriation of sufficient funds and verification that a person meets the eligibility requirements in subsection (c), the department may award physician assistant student loan repayment grants to qualifying persons of up to twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000) per year for a maximum of five (5) years if the sum of all physician assistant student loan repayment grants made to a qualifying person does not exceed the recipient's total student loan indebtedness.

(f) The department may use private donations, grants, federal monies, and state monies to implement, support, promote, or maintain the physician assistant student loan repayment program. The department shall issue an annual report to the governor, the chair of the education administration committee of the house of representatives, and the chair of the senate education committee detailing the number of persons applying for

and awarded grants, including information regarding the number of applicants and grant recipients identified by health resource shortage areas.

(g) A person who receives a physician assistant student loan repayment grant and breaches the contract created pursuant to subdivision (c)(4) by failing to begin or to complete the obligated services is liable for liquidated damages in an amount equivalent to the amount that would be owed for default and any other penalties as determined and authorized by the department. The department may retain legal counsel and commence whatever actions necessary to collect loan payments and charges if there is a default or a breach of a contract entered into under subdivision (c)(4). The department may waive the liquidated damages provisions of this subsection (g) if it determines that death or permanent physical disability accounted for the failure of the participant to fulfill the contract. The department may prescribe additional conditions for default, cancellation, waiver, or suspension.

(h) A retroactive award of a physician assistant student loan repayment grant must not be made under this section.

SECTION 2. This act takes effect July 1, 2024, the public welfare requiring it.