

MINUTES
SENATE HEALTH & WELFARE COMMITTEE

DATE: Thursday, March 01, 2018

TIME: 3:00 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW54

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Heider, Vice Chairman Souza, Senators Martin, Harris, Agenbroad, Foreman, Potts, and Jordan

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: Senator Lee

NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CONVENED: **Chairman Heider** called the meeting of the Health and Welfare Committee (Committee) to order at 3:02 p.m.

HCR 047 **Department of Health and Welfare Rule Rejection. Representative Packer** explained this resolution would repeal an Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (DHW) administrative rule docket.

MOTION: There being no testimony or questions, **Senator Martin** moved to send **HCR 047** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Vice Chairman Souza** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

H 0472 **Rural Physicians, State Match. Representative Vander Woude** explained this bill would require the State to match student contributions to the Rural Physician Incentive Program (RPIP) Fund at a rate of two-to-one. Students in State-supported seats at the University of Washington and the University of Utah medical schools currently pay \$1,300 per year into the RPIP fund. The money is used to provide loan repayment awards to medical graduates who return to Idaho to work as physicians. **Representative Vander Woude** stated the bill would cost the State \$600,000.

DISCUSSION: **Vice Chairman Souza** asked if the money could be better spent on residency programs. **Representative Vander Woude** acknowledged the importance of residency programs, but noted physicians still have high levels of debt after residency. He asserted rural physicians generally earn less than physicians in urban areas. This bill would create an incentive for physicians to work in rural areas.

Senator Martin asked why the State does not offer similar loan repayment programs for other professions. **Representative Vander Woude** explained Idaho has a physician shortage which needs to be addressed. Other professions in Idaho are not suffering from a comparable shortage.

TESTIMONY: **Mary Sheridan** introduced herself as the Bureau Chief for the Bureau of Rural Health and Primary Care (Bureau) in the Division of Public Health within DHW. The Bureau is responsible for administering RPIP, which is a loan repayment program for rural physicians working in federally-designated health profession shortage areas. **Ms. Sheridan** spoke in support of this bill. She noted Idaho has a physician shortage and RPIP lacks funding. This bill would expand opportunities for physician loan repayment.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Jordan** inquired as to the significance of providing RPIP funds to physicians in federally-designated health profession shortage areas. **Ms. Sheridan** stated designating shortage areas creates opportunities to bring more resources into those areas.

TESTIMONY: **Dr. Bridgette Baker, M.D.** introduced herself as a family physician and spoke in support of this bill. **Dr. Baker** noted Oregon provides physicians with more loan repayment assistance than Idaho. She stated she temporarily relocated to Oregon in order to more easily pay off her student loans.

Susie Pouliot introduced herself as the Chief Executive Officer of the Idaho Medical Association and the Chair of the RPIP Board. She stated the RPIP Board receives between 18 and 20 RPIP applications annually. On average, the RPIP Board can only fund 5 or 6 physicians due to a lack of funding. **Ms. Pouliot** mentioned students in State-supported seats at the University of Washington and the University of Utah medical schools pay \$1,600 per year into RPIP. The RPIP Board wanted to increase the RPIP fund, but did not want to increase student fees. The RPIP Board invited the Idaho College of Osteopathic Medicine (ICOM) to participate in RPIP, but ICOM declined. **Ms. Pouliot** stressed the importance of RPIP and described the positive economic impact physicians have upon their communities.

DISCUSSION: **Vice Chairman Souza** asked how the RPIP Board decides which applicants will receive funding. **Ms. Pouliot** stated the RPIP Board scores applicants based on their Health Profession Shortage Area (HPSA) score and their ties to Idaho. She explained priority is given to applicants who paid into the RPIP as medical students or who attended high school or college in Idaho. The RPIP Board also considers community support when reviewing applications.

Vice Chairman Souza asked if local hospitals donate to the RPIP fund. **Ms. Pouliot** stated any community entity or hospital can donate to the fund.

Senator Agenbroad inquired as to how the RPIP Board could convince ICOM to join the program. **Ms. Pouliot** explained ICOM is a private entity that does not receive State funding. The University of Washington and the University of Utah have an incentive to assess RPIP fees because they receive State support. She expressed hope that ICOM would join RPIP in the future.

Senator Jordan inquired as to the correct balance between the number of RPIP awards offered and the amount of each award. **Ms. Pouliot** stated, prior to 2015, RPIP only provided award recipients \$50,000 total over four years. Surrounding states offered more funds for physician loan repayments, making Idaho less competitive. In 2015, RPIP awards increased to \$100,000 total over four years. **Ms. Pouliot** noted all surrounding states allocate funds to support their physician loan repayment programs. She asserted RPIP award amounts are now competitive.

Senator Jordan asked if State funding for RPIP could slow the outflow of Idaho physicians and increase the number of physicians entering Idaho. **Ms. Pouliot** responded in the affirmative. She explained State funding for RPIP could allow the RPIP Board to double or triple the number of award recipients.

MOTION: There being no further testimony or questions, **Senator Harris** moved to send **H 0472** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Jordan** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**. **Senator Potts** and **Senator Foreman** voted **nay**.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business, **Chairman Heider** adjourned the meeting at 3:36 p.m.

Senator Heider
Chair

Rachel Goodman
Secretary