March 7, 2023

Dear Senators:

On behalf of Idaho's 27 rural Critical Access Hospitals, we strongly support House Bill 213 – the Rural Nurse Loan Repayment Program – which will be before the Senate Health and Welfare Committee for a hearing today.

Every state in the nation is facing a healthcare workforce shortage, and Idaho is competing against each of them to ensure we have the highest quality workforce delivering the highest quality of care in each of our hospitals. While we develop longer-term strategies to expand our healthcare workforce pipeline, HB 213 helps us in the short term to retain our nurses and incentivizes others to return home or start their career in a rural hospital or clinic.

As you will see in the bill, it is narrowly crafted to ensure that to qualify for this financial assistance on nursing education student loans, the nurse must practice in a Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSA) or a Critical Access Hospital in some of our most rural communities. There are very few tools in a small hospital's toolbox to retain a highly qualified workforce. This will be a significant addition for them.

Awards would be limited to qualified education debt up to $5,000 in the first full year of commitment, and $10,000 in years two and three for a maximum of $25,000 over three years. Only verified debt loan statements will qualify toward awards. Nurses must commit to spending a minimum of 32 hours per week, on average, employed as a nurse in an eligible site. Awards are distributed at the end of each year following the term of service, and nurses entitled to receive education loan repayment from other state or federal programs would not qualify.

Whether it's one nurse or 100 who takes advantage of this incentive, it will be a benefit to our rural healthcare workforce and help improve access to care for our fellow Idahoans.

Thank you for your support of nurses in Idaho and investing in the health of our communities across the state.

Please vote "**YES**" on House Bill 213.

Sincerely,

Brian Whitlock
President/CEO