

REVENUE: No revenue impact

FISCAL: Fiscal statement issued

Action:	Do Pass
Vote:	4 - 0 - 1
Yeas:	George G., Kruse, Verger, Morrisette
Nays:	0
Exc.:	Monnes Anderson
Prepared By:	Ilana Weinbaum, Administrator
Meeting Dates:	1/29

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Requires that health professionals complete minimum practice requirements in the period immediately following the completion of their training requirements or the execution of a Rural Health Services agreement with the Oregon Student Assistance Commission, whichever comes later. Allows dentists to qualify for Rural Health Service Program. Directs Office of Rural Health to select qualifying practice sites for the program. Allows the Oregon Student Assistance Commission to give preference to participants who agree to practice in certain communities.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Shortage of dentists in rural areas
- Definition of rural community
- Percent of participants who remain in rural communities after program participation
- Matching funds from rural communities
- Ability of participants to postpone or opt out of service under current program arrangements

EFFECT OF COMMITTEE AMENDMENT: No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

The Rural Health Services loan repayment program was created in 1989 (ORS 442.550 – 442.570) as part of a comprehensive state effort to enhance medical services in rural areas and encourage family practice physicians, nurse practitioners, pharmacists and physician assistants to practice in designated rural areas in Oregon with unmet health care needs. It was funded at a level of \$400,000 per biennium, and remains at that level today. In exchange for qualifying service, participants may receive funds to repay qualifying graduate-level federal loans. The maximum benefit from the program per participant is \$100,000. Physicians and pharmacists must work at a qualifying site for a minimum of three years and nurse practitioners and physician assistants must work for two.

Under the current structure, awards are tied to candidates and not to specific practice sites and award recipients have three years to decide where to fulfill their practice obligation and can decline the award at any time during this period. The program is administered by the Oregon Student Assistance Commission and under current funding levels, the Commission is able to make awards to one or two physicians, plus four or five awards divided among nurse practitioners, physician assistants and pharmacists.