



Oregon Office of Rural Health

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Testimony re: HB 2048  
House Health Care Committee  
March 2, 2015  
Scott Ekblad, Director, Oregon Office of Rural Health

Chair Greenlick, Vice-Chairs Hayden and Nosse, Members of the Committee:

The Oregon Medicaid Primary Care Loan Repayment Program was established within the Oregon Health Authority in 2013. The OHA contracts with the Oregon Office of Rural Health to administer the program; we receive the applications and conduct the award process.

The purpose of the program is to attract new health care providers willing serve Medicaid patients using the incentive of student loan repayment. When making award decisions we not only evaluate the practitioner's ability and willingness to expand access to care for that population; we also evaluate the appropriateness of the practice site.

Eligible professions are:

- Dentists
- Expanded Practice Dental Hygienists
- Physicians specializing in Family Medicine, General Internal Medicine, Geriatrics, Pediatrics or Obstetrics/Gynecology as well as General, Pediatric or Geriatric Psychiatrists
- Physician Assistants specializing in Family Medicine, General Internal Medicine, Geriatrics, Pediatrics or Obstetrics/Gynecology
- Nurse Practitioners specializing in Adult Health, Women's Health Care, Geriatrics, Pediatrics, Psychiatric Mental Health, Family Practice or Nurse Midwifery
- Clinical Psychologists
- Clinical Social Workers
- Marriage and Family Therapists

There was approximately \$3.6 million available to award to candidates. The first cycle of awards was made in March of 2014 and we have made awards on a quarterly basis since. We have up to three more cycles to go for a total of 8 in the biennium, although it is likely we won't need all three to expend the remaining funds.

In the first 5 cycles:

- 179 applications were received
- 26 loan repayment awards were made
  - 14 committed to practice in an urban site; 12 committed to a rural site
  - The professional breakdown is 6 physicians, 9 nurse practitioners, 2 physician assistants, 7 dentists and 2 psychiatrists
- We have obligated approximately \$2,777,000, which leaves us about \$823,000 left to award this biennium.

It should be noted that, while the program was authorized and funded for the 2013-15 biennium, monitoring and enforcement of award obligations will continue beyond that timeframe.

I would imagine the committee would like to know the impact of adding occupational therapists to this program, but at this point there are too many unknown variables to give you a reasoned answer. I do not know if this program will be renewed by the legislature or, if so, at what level of funding. If it is renewed, I would need to confer with OHA and supporters of this bill to get an idea of the criteria to be used to establish eligibility for occupational therapists. In other words, we would need to know if there is a pie, how big that pie will be, and how large a slice occupational therapists represent. I would be happy to work with OHA to help the committee find answers to those questions.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.