

House Bill 427 (COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE)

By: Representatives Newton of the 123<sup>rd</sup>, Cooper of the 43<sup>rd</sup>, Hatchett of the 150<sup>th</sup>, and Spencer of the 180<sup>th</sup>

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED  
AN ACT

1 To amend Chapter 34 of Title 31 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to  
2 physicians for rural areas assistance, so as to expand the service cancelable loan program for  
3 physicians in underserved areas to dentists, physician assistants, and advanced practice  
4 registered nurses; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other  
5 purposes.

6 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

7 **SECTION 1.**

8 Chapter 34 of Title 31 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to physicians for  
9 rural areas assistance, is amended by revising Code Section 31-34-1, relating to the short  
10 title, as follows:

11 "31-34-1.

12 This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the 'Physicians, Dentists, Physician  
13 Assistants, and Advanced Practice Registered Nurses for Rural Areas Assistance Act.'"

14 **SECTION 2.**

15 Said chapter is further amended by revising Code Section 31-34-2, relating to the purpose  
16 and intent of the chapter, as follows:

17 "31-34-2.

18 It is the purpose of this chapter to increase the number of physicians, dentists, physician  
19 assistants, and advanced practice registered nurses in ~~physician~~ underserved rural areas of  
20 Georgia by making loans to physicians, dentists, physician assistants, and advanced  
21 practice registered nurses who have completed their medical or health care education and  
22 allowing such loans to be repaid by such physicians, dentists, physician assistants, and  
23 advanced practice registered nurses agreeing to practice medicine or provide health care  
24 services in such rural areas and by making grants to hospitals and, as determined by the  
25 Georgia Board for Physician Workforce, other health care entities, local governments, and

26 civic organizations in ~~physician~~ underserved rural areas of Georgia that agree to provide  
 27 matching funds to the grant, with the intent to enhance recruitment efforts in bringing  
 28 physicians, dentists, physician assistants, and advanced practice registered nurses to such  
 29 areas. It is the intent of the General Assembly that if funds are available to the Georgia  
 30 Board for Physician Workforce to make loans, grants, or scholarships under this chapter  
 31 or under other applicable state law, the Georgia Board for Physician Workforce shall give  
 32 priority to loans and scholarships under Part 6 of Article 7 of Chapter 3 of Title 20 and to  
 33 loans under Code Section 31-34-4."

34 **SECTION 3.**

35 Said chapter is further amended by revising Code Section 31-34-4, relating to loan applicant  
 36 qualifications and rules and regulations, as follows:

37 "31-34-4.

38 (a) A physician, dentist, physician assistant, or advanced practice registered nurse who  
 39 receives a loan under the program provided for in this chapter shall be a citizen or national  
 40 of the United States licensed to practice ~~medicine~~ his or her health care profession within  
 41 the State of Georgia at the time the loan is made, and shall be a graduate of an accredited  
 42 graduate medical education program or other applicable accredited health care education  
 43 program located in the United States which has received accreditation or provisional  
 44 accreditation by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education or the  
 45 American Osteopathic Association or such other applicable accreditation for other health  
 46 care education programs, as determined by the board.

47 (b) The board shall make a full investigation of the qualifications of an applicant for a loan  
 48 under the provisions of this chapter to determine the applicant's fitness for participation in  
 49 such loan program, and for such purposes, the board may propound such examinations to  
 50 applicants as the board deems proper. The board's investigation shall include a  
 51 determination of the outstanding medical or health care education loans incurred by the  
 52 applicant while completing his or her medical or health care education and training.

53 (c) The board is authorized to consider among other criteria for granting loans under the  
 54 provisions of this chapter the state residency status and home area of the applying  
 55 physician, dentist, physician assistant, or advanced practice registered nurse and to give  
 56 priority to those applicants who are physicians, dentists, physician assistants, and advanced  
 57 practice registered nurses actively practicing or beginning active practice in specialties  
 58 experiencing shortages or distribution problems in rural areas of this state as determined  
 59 by the board pursuant to rules and regulations adopted by it in accordance with this chapter.

60 (d) The board may adopt and prescribe such rules and regulations as it deems necessary  
 61 or appropriate to administer and carry out the loan program provided for in this chapter.

62 Such rules and regulations shall provide for fixing the rate of regular interest to accrue on  
 63 loans granted under the provisions of this chapter. Such regular rate of interest shall not  
 64 exceed by more than 2 percent the prime rate published from time to time by the Board of  
 65 Governors of the Federal Reserve System. Within such limitation, the regular rate of  
 66 interest may be increased for new recipients of loans under this chapter."

67 **SECTION 4.**

68 Said chapter is further amended by revising Code Section 31-34-4.1, relating to grants to  
 69 hospitals and other entities, use of funds, and rules and regulations authorized, as follows:  
 70 "31-34-4.1.

71 (a) After providing priority consideration to granting loans pursuant to Code Section  
 72 31-34-4, the board is authorized to make grants to hospitals and, as determined by the  
 73 board, other health care entities, local governments, and civic organizations in ~~physician~~  
 74 underserved rural areas of Georgia, provided that any such hospital, health care entity, local  
 75 government, or civic organization matches such grant in an amount not less than such  
 76 grant. Such grants shall be for the purpose of enhancing recruitment efforts in bringing  
 77 physicians, dentists, physician assistants, and advanced practice registered nurses to such  
 78 areas.

79 (b) Acceptable expenditures of grant funds by a hospital or other health care entity, local  
 80 government, or civic organization include, but are not limited to, medical or health care  
 81 education loan repayment, salary supplements for physicians, dentists, physician assistants,  
 82 and advanced practice registered nurses, and additional support staff for a physician's,  
 83 dentist's, physician assistant's, or advanced practice registered nurse's office. Grant funds  
 84 shall not be used for hiring or paying a recruiting firm or individual recruiter.

85 (c) The board is authorized to give priority over other grant applicants to applicant  
 86 hospitals and other health care entities, local governments, and civic organizations in rural  
 87 areas of this state experiencing shortages or distribution problems of certain specialties as  
 88 determined by the board pursuant to rules and regulations adopted by the board in  
 89 accordance with this chapter.

90 (d) The board may adopt and prescribe such rules and regulations as it deems necessary  
 91 or appropriate to administer and carry out the grant program provided for in this chapter.  
 92 Such rules and regulations shall provide for the criteria that must be met by an applicant  
 93 and the penalties that shall be incurred for failure to comply with the grant requirements."

94 **SECTION 5.**

95 Said chapter is further amended by revising Code Section 31-34-5, relating to service  
96 cancelable loans, amounts, repayments, and determination of physician underserved rural  
97 areas, as follows:

98 "31-34-5.

99 (a)(1) The board shall have the authority to grant to each applicant approved by the board  
100 on a one-year renewable basis a service cancelable loan for a period not exceeding four  
101 years. The amount of the loan shall be determined by the board, but such amount shall  
102 be related to the applicant's outstanding obligations incurred as a direct result of  
103 completing medical or health care education and training.

104 (2) A loan or loans to each approved applicant shall be granted on the condition that the  
105 full amount of the loan or loans shall be repaid to the State of Georgia in services to be  
106 rendered by the applicant's practicing his or her profession in a board approved physician,  
107 dentist, physician assistant, or advanced practice registered nurse underserved rural area  
108 of Georgia. For each full year of practicing his or her profession in such a ~~physician~~  
109 underserved rural area, the physician, dentist, physician assistant, or advanced practice  
110 registered nurse who obtained the loan shall receive credit for the full amount of one  
111 year's loan plus regular interest which accrued on such amount.

112 (b)(1) The board shall have the authority to make grants to each applicant hospital or  
113 other health care entity, local government, or civic organization approved by the board  
114 on a yearly basis, renewable each year at the discretion of the board. The amount of the  
115 grant shall be determined by the board, but such amount shall be related to and shall not  
116 exceed the applicant's proposed expenditures to enhance recruitment efforts in bringing  
117 one or more physicians, dentists, physician assistants, or advanced practice registered  
118 nurses to the ~~physician~~ underserved rural area.

119 (2) A grant to an approved applicant shall be made on any condition or conditions  
120 determined by the board, which may include, but not be limited to, that one or more  
121 physicians, dentists, physician assistants, or advanced practice registered nurses are  
122 employed and retained in the ~~physician~~ underserved rural area for a prescribed minimum  
123 length of time.

124 (c) In making a determination of physician, dentist, physician assistant, or advanced  
125 practice registered nurse underserved rural areas of Georgia, the board shall seek the advice  
126 and assistance of the Department of Public Health, the University of Georgia Cooperative  
127 Extension Service, the Department of Community Affairs, and such other public or private  
128 associations or organizations as the board determines to be of assistance in making such  
129 determinations. Criteria to determine physician, dentist, physician assistant, or advanced

130 practice registered nurse underserved rural areas shall include, but shall not be limited to,  
131 relevant statistical data related to the following:

132 (1) The ratio of physicians, dentists, physician assistants, or advanced practice registered  
133 nurses to population in the area;

134 (2) Indications of the health status of the population in the area;

135 (3) The poverty level and dependent age groups of the population in the area;

136 (4) Indications of community support for more physicians, dentists, physician assistants,  
137 or advanced practice registered nurses in the area; and

138 (5) Indications that access to the physician's, dentist's, physician assistant's, or advanced  
139 practice registered nurse's services is available to every person in the underserved area  
140 regardless of ability to pay."

141 **SECTION 6.**

142 All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.