House Bill 427 (AS PASSED HOUSE AND SENATE)
By: Representatives Newton of the 123rd, Cooper of the 43rd, Hatchett of the 150th, and Spencer of the 180th

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

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

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

SECTION 1.
Chapter 34 of Title 31 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to physicians for rural areas assistance, is amended by revising Code Section 31-34-1, relating to the short title, as follows:
"31-34-1. This chapter shall be known and may be cited as the 'Physicians, Dentists, Physician Assistants, and Advanced Practice Registered Nurses for Rural Areas Assistance Act.'"

SECTION 2.
Said chapter is further amended by revising Code Section 31-34-2, relating to the purpose and intent of the chapter, as follows:
"31-34-2. It is the purpose of this chapter to increase the number of physicians, dentists, physician assistants, and advanced practice registered nurses in physician underserved rural areas of Georgia by making loans to physicians, dentists, physician assistants, and advanced practice registered nurses who have completed their medical or health care education and allowing such loans to be repaid by such physicians, dentists, physician assistants, and advanced practice registered nurses agreeing to practice medicine or provide health care services in such rural areas and by making grants to hospitals and, as determined by the Georgia Board for Physician Workforce, other health care entities, local governments, and

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

SECTION 3.

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

"31-34-4.

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

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

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

(d) The board may adopt and prescribe such rules and regulations as it deems necessary or appropriate to administer and carry out the loan program provided for in this chapter.
Such rules and regulations shall provide for fixing the rate of regular interest to accrue on loans granted under the provisions of this chapter. Such regular rate of interest shall not exceed by more than 2 percent the prime rate published from time to time by the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. Within such limitation, the regular rate of interest may be increased for new recipients of loans under this chapter."

**SECTION 4.**

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

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

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

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

(d) The board may adopt and prescribe such rules and regulations as it deems necessary or appropriate to administer and carry out the grant program provided for in this chapter. Such rules and regulations shall provide for the criteria that must be met by an applicant and the penalties that shall be incurred for failure to comply with the grant requirements."
Said chapter is further amended by revising Code Section 31-34-5, relating to service cancelable loans, amounts, repayments, and determination of physician underserved rural areas, as follows:

"31-34-5.

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

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

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

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

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

...
relevant statistical data related to the following:

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

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

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

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

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

SECTION 6.

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