

House Bill 659

By: Representatives Greene of the 154th, Taylor of the 173rd, Hawkins of the 27th, Jasperse of the 11th, and Hagan of the 156th

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 medical professionals for rural assistance, so as to expand medical education funding and the
3 service cancelable loan program to include optometrists; to provide for related matters; to
4 repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

5 BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

6 style="text-align:center">**SECTION 1.**

7 Chapter 34 of Title 31 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to medical
8 professionals for rural assistance, is amended by revising Code Section 31-34-2, relating to
9 purpose and intent of article, as follows:

10 "31-34-2.

11 It is the purpose of this article to increase the number of physicians, dentists, optometrists,
12 physician assistants, and advanced practice registered nurses in underserved rural areas of
13 Georgia by making loans to physicians, dentists, optometrists, physician assistants, and
14 advanced practice registered nurses who have completed their medical or health care
15 education and to dental students and allowing such loans to be repaid by such physicians,
16 dentists, optometrists, physician assistants, advanced practice registered nurses, and dental

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17 students agreeing to practice medicine or provide health care services in such rural areas
18 and by making grants to hospitals and, as determined by the Georgia Board of Health Care
19 Workforce, other health care entities, local governments, and civic organizations in
20 underserved rural areas of Georgia that agree to provide matching funds to the grant, with
21 the intent to enhance recruitment efforts in bringing physicians, dentists, optometrists,
22 physician assistants, and advanced practice registered nurses to such areas. It is the intent
23 of the General Assembly that if funds are available to the Georgia Board of Health Care
24 Workforce to make loans, grants, or scholarships under this article or under other
25 applicable state law, the Georgia Board of Health Care Workforce shall give priority to
26 loans and scholarships under Part 6 of Article 7 of Chapter 3 of Title 20 and to loans under
27 Code Section 31-34-4."

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SECTION 2.

29 Said chapter is further amended by revising paragraph (1) of subsection (a) and paragraph (1)
30 of subsection (c) of Code Section 31-34-4, relating to loan applicant qualifications and rules
31 and regulations, as follows:

32 "(a)(1) A physician, dentist, optometrist, physician assistant, or advanced practice
33 registered nurse who receives a loan under the program provided for in this article shall
34 be a citizen or national of the United States licensed to practice his or her health care
35 profession within the State of Georgia at the time the loan is made, and shall be a
36 graduate of an accredited graduate medical education program or other applicable
37 accredited health care education program located in the United States which has received
38 accreditation or provisional accreditation by the Accreditation Council for Graduate
39 Medical Education, or the American Osteopathic Association, or such other applicable
40 accreditation for other health care education programs; as determined by the board."

41 "(c)(1) The board is authorized to consider, among other criteria for granting loans under
42 the provisions of this article, the state residency status and home area of the applying

43 physician, dentist, optometrist, physician assistant, or advanced practice registered nurse
44 and to give priority to those applicants who are physicians, dentists, optometrists,
45 physician assistants, and advanced practice registered nurses actively practicing or
46 beginning active practice in specialties experiencing shortages or distribution problems
47 in rural areas of this state as determined by the board pursuant to rules and regulations
48 adopted by it in accordance with this article."

49 **SECTION 3.**

50 Said chapter is further amended by revising subsections (a) and (b) of Code Section
51 31-34-4.1, relating to grants to hospitals and other entities, use of funds, and rules and
52 regulations authorized, as follows:

53 "(a) After providing priority consideration to granting loans pursuant to Code Section
54 31-34-4, the board is authorized to make grants to hospitals and, as determined by the
55 board, other health care entities, local governments, and civic organizations in underserved
56 rural areas of Georgia, provided that any such hospital, health care entity, local
57 government, or civic organization matches such grant in an amount not less than such
58 grant. Such grants shall be for the purpose of enhancing recruitment efforts in bringing
59 physicians, dentists, optometrists, physician assistants, and advanced practice registered
60 nurses to such areas.

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

SECTION 4.

68
69 Said chapter is further amended by revising Code Section 31-34-5, relating to service
70 cancelable loan, amount, repayment, and determination of underserved rural areas, as
71 follows:

72 "31-34-5.

73 (a)(1) The board shall have the authority to grant to each applicant approved by the board
74 on a one-year renewable basis a service cancelable loan for a period not exceeding four
75 years; provided, however, that, for applicants ~~that~~ who are dental students, service
76 cancelable loans shall be for a period of four years. The amount of the loan shall be
77 determined by the board, but such amount shall be related to the applicant's outstanding
78 obligations incurred as a direct result of completing medical or health care education and
79 training.

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

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

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

100 (c) In making a determination of physician, dentist, optometrist, physician assistant, or
101 advanced practice registered nurse underserved rural areas of Georgia, the board shall seek
102 the advice and assistance of the Department of Public Health, the University of Georgia
103 Cooperative Extension Service, the Department of Community Affairs, and such other
104 public or private associations or organizations as the board determines to be of assistance
105 in making such determinations. Criteria to determine physician, dentist, optometrist,
106 physician assistant, or advanced practice registered nurse underserved rural areas shall
107 include, but shall not be limited to, relevant statistical data related to the following:

- 108 (1) The ratio of physicians, dentists, optometrists, physician assistants, or advanced
109 practice registered nurses to population in the area;
- 110 (2) Indications of the health status of the population in the area;
- 111 (3) The poverty level and dependent age groups of the population in the area;
- 112 (4) Indications of community support for more physicians, dentists, optometrists,
113 physician assistants, or advanced practice registered nurses in the area; and
- 114 (5) Indications that access to the physician's, dentist's, optometrist's, physician assistant's,
115 or advanced practice registered nurse's services is available to every person in the
116 underserved area regardless of ability to pay."

117 **SECTION 5.**

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