



January 10, 2024

Senator Regina Birdsell
Senate Health and Human Services Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 101
33 N. State Street
Concord, NH 03301

RE: [SB 403](#) relative to health care workforce investments

Dear Chairman Birdsell and Members of the Senate HHS Committee:

My name is Gregory White, and I am the Co-Chief Executive Officer of Lamprey Health Care (Lamprey), a federally qualified health center (FQHC) with sites in Nashua, Newmarket, and Raymond, as well as a mobile health unit and several integrated care locations across the community. Our FQHC serves as a medical home to over 15,000 people from over 40 communities across southeastern New Hampshire. I am grateful for the opportunity to provide input today on SB 403, which proposes sensible, timely investments in New Hampshire's primary care workforce and protects access to primary care for Granite Staters.

Health care workforce shortages in New Hampshire have been growing at a concerning pace for years and now extend across both clinical and non-clinical positions. At Lamprey, our vacant FTE positions include Registered Nurses, Family Practice Physicians, Family Nurse Practitioners, Physician Assistants, Behavioral Health Clinicians, and Medical Assistants. It is critical that we invest in policies in 2024 to help retain our current staff – who we cannot afford to lose – and broaden the pipeline for the future workforce.

The purpose of SB 403 is to create more opportunities for individuals to work in health care. This includes funding to support Community Health Workers (CHWs), who are a critical component of integrated primary care. CHWs assist patients with accessing services they need to improve their overall health and quality of life, including heating, mortgage assistance, health insurance, transportation, food, and childcare. Lamprey Health Care and many health care organizations across the state that employ CHWs rely on intermittent grant funding to support this invaluable workforce. Voluntary certification of CHWs included in SB 403 is a decisive step to providing much-needed financial security for this workforce and will allow our health care organizations to seek Medicaid and commercial reimbursement for the services they provide.

Funding for the State Loan Repayment Program (SLRP) is another critical investment included in SB 403. SLRP is the #1 recruitment and retention tool for federally qualified health centers.

The program provides partial payment towards educational loans of health care professionals in exchange for a commitment to serve in a medically underserved area. Community health centers, community mental health centers, critical access hospitals, and other community-based health care providers offer this program to our staff who qualify. Right now, eligible applicants only include individuals licensed by the State of New Hampshire or behavioral health professionals working under supervision towards licensure. Expanding SLRP to include staff with bachelor's degrees will allow us to recruit and retain other key employees, including case managers.

SB 403 also includes a continued investment in a marketing and outreach campaign led by Bi-State Primary Care Association's Recruitment Center, the only non-profit recruitment program in the state. The Recruitment Center is an excellent resource for our state's FQHCs, rural health clinics, and other practices. Their team has the structure in place to connect interested health professionals identified through the campaign with practices that have vacancies. This program is essential to drawing candidates to New Hampshire and helping practices like ours recruit the staff we need, including primary care physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, dentists, dental hygienists, psychiatrists, and mental health and substance use disorder treatment professionals.

Other investments of SB 403 that we enthusiastically support include funding for the Family Medicine Residency Program in the North Country; nursing student preceptor programs; and the NH Area Health Education Centers (AHECs). Lamprey sponsors both the Southern AHEC program and the Nurse Practitioner Fellowship Program, and many of the professional development courses for our staff are hosted by the AHEC team. The AHEC programs are an invaluable resource to both increase workforce and to retain staff working in primary care, community health, and medically underserved areas.

We are proud of the work we do at Lamprey Health Care and grateful for our team who deliver this care to the community. Our ability to continue to do this work, with the availability, efficiency, and quality outcomes, is directly tied to the recruitment and retention of our dedicated staff. It is imperative that we have the resources to keep our caregivers in place. Our ability to pay these professionals in the face of a very tight labor market and in competition with larger health systems, is severely constrained.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide my support for SB 403. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Gregory White
Co-Chief Executive Officer
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