



January 10, 2024

Senator Regina Birdsell, Chair  
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 Chairwoman Birdsell and Members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on SB 403, relative to health care workforce investments. As the Chief Executive Officer of Coos County Family Health Services, I am pleased to offer input about SB 403, a bill that makes critical investments in New Hampshire's primary care workforce and that will help to ensure access to care for Granite Staters.

Coos County Family Health Services is a federally qualified health center (FQHC) that has served North County residents for nearly 50 years. Our staff of approximately 160 individuals provides care for more than 12,000 patients. The organization offers a wide array of primary care, mental health, and dental services. We are the sole provider of primary care in the Berlin-Gorham region, and recently established a clinic serving the greater Colebrook area. Nearly half of our patients have incomes at or below 200% of the Federal poverty level, which is \$29,160 for a household of one.

Like elsewhere across New Hampshire, the North Country is experiencing unprecedented shortages in its health care workforce. More challenges lie ahead, as a significant percentage of the primary care workforce in our region is nearing retirement age. Additionally, the North Country ranks near the bottom in nearly all health outcome measures. Many of our communities experience higher than average rates of chronic disease, substance misuse, and behavioral health disorders, and have a rapidly growing number of frail older adults living alone in their homes.

In response to these concerns, in late 2021, our organization applied for and received approximately \$500,000 in funding from the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to develop a residency program to prepare family medicine physicians to work in underserved rural communities across the state. In conjunction with our local hospital partner, North Country Healthcare, and with the assistance of several other groups including Dartmouth Health, the NH State Office of Rural Health and the University of New England, we are well on our way towards establishing an accredited family medicine residency program that will accept residents in 2025.

The program will accept four residents each year for a three-year residency that will offer new medical school graduates the opportunity to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively serve rural communities. Residents will provide patient care under the auspices of experienced physicians at a variety of sites including community health centers and local and tertiary care hospitals in our region.

We took on the challenging task of establishing a residency program to address the critical shortage of family medicine physicians in our state because it is the right thing to do for our patients, our communities, and New Hampshire. Research has demonstrated that most physicians tend to settle and begin their practices within 50 miles of their residency site. New Hampshire desperately needs more family physicians; this program can help address that shortage and is a proven strategy that other states have adopted with good success. Currently, there are no family medicine residency programs north of Concord.

The funding being requested will help support the program in its early years and will leverage matching federal and philanthropic support. The cost of offering this program is approximately \$250,000 per resident per year. Federal support will cover approximately 65% of this cost, leaving the remainder to be covered with other funds. Many other states provide support for residency programs to ensure their citizens have sufficient access to health care services and have demonstrated the effectiveness of this strategy.

In our view, state support for a family medicine residency program represents a strategic investment in our health care workforce that will yield multiple returns in the form of an improved supply of family physicians, better health outcomes individuals and families, and healthier New Hampshire communities.

Thank you for your consideration. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ken Gordon', is written over a printed name.

Ken Gordon  
Chief Executive Officer  
Coos County Family Health Services