

Testimony
Engrossed House Bill 1396 – Department of Human Services
Senate Human Services Committee
Judy Lee, Chairman
March 9, 2015

Chairman Lee, members of the Senate Human Services Committee, I am Dr. Andy McLean, Medical Director of the Department of Human Services (Department). I am here to provide a perspective from the Department regarding Engrossed House Bill 1396 in the form of feedback from the field, for consideration as you review this bill. The primary issues for consideration are: 1) other contracting entities beside "cities", 2) tele-behavioral health, and 3) requirement for a five-year contract.

Engrossed House Bill 1396 appears to enhance recruitment of "healthcare professionals willing to provide services in cities that have a defined need for such services." Having grown up in the family of a small town physician, I recognize the need for such recruitment. However, limiting the contractor to a "city" may limit both the type of practitioner providing service, as well as the method of provision of service. As the proposed language reads, the Department would be unable to be a matching contributor for state-sponsored loan repayment, as we are not a "city".

It is difficult to discern from the language of the bill whether the program is intended to require a healthcare professional to provide care "in person", i.e., onsite with the participating entity. If changes were made to allow other entities, like the Department, to participate in the state-sponsored loan repayment, a requirement that care be provided "in person" would likely prevent the Department from participating as we are not always providing care "in person".

There has been significant interest and commitment within our state regarding meeting behavioral health needs. While it is possible, psychiatrists are unlikely to be recruited to small communities. However, with telemedicine technology, behavioral health providers may be able to provide a substantial amount of care to those communities. Our department has been looking to enhance tele-behavioral health care in underserved areas, and has been in dialogue with soon-to-be-graduating psychiatry residents and fellows. As previous testimony this session has shown, for recent graduates, expeditious loan repayment is often the number one factor in job selection.

Additionally, section 7 of Engrossed House Bill 1396 allows the health council to participate in federal programs providing for the repayment of student loans on behalf of health care professionals. It has been the Department's experience that some Federal programs for loan repayment, such as the National Health Service Corps, have significant limitations on the number of telemedicine hours an applicant can provide. While this has made sense from a primary care recruitment standpoint, it is actually limiting the recruitment of psychiatrists to our state.

Other feedback received from prospective applicants is concern regarding the change to a five-year commitment to the student loan repayment program.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I would be happy to answer any questions.