

*Testimony of Sara LeMaster, MPAP  
HB 5005*

*Manager of Government Relations and Public Policy  
Community Health Center Association of Connecticut  
February 21, 2020*

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on the Department of Public Health portion of the state budget. On behalf of the Community Health Center Association of Connecticut and the 17 health centers operating in the state, I'd like to offer the following proposal:

I respectfully request that you appropriate \$500,000 to the Public Health budget to reinstate the State Loan Repayment Program. This program was administered for many years under the Department of Public Health<sup>1</sup>, and was discontinued in 2011. New York, Rhode Island, and Massachusetts all have state loan repayment programs, in addition to 37 other states. The Federal Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) will match state funds invested in this program up to \$1 million every year.

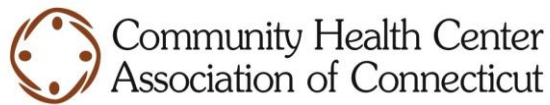
The average medical student graduates with \$190,000 in debt and 25% of medical students graduate with over \$200,000 in debt. The State Loan Repayment Program will provide up to \$25,000 in debt relief per year to people who work in Federally Qualifies Health Centers (FQHCs) and provide vital medical, dental and behavioral health care to Connecticut residents. An investment of \$500,000 with a federal match would mean that Connecticut can forgive up to \$1 million per year in student debt to doctors, nurses, pediatricians, and behavioral health professionals while they help our communities stay healthy and thrive. The Connecticut Department of Public Health has stated that the Federal match cannot be accessed until September 2022, but we can begin investing in the fund in 2021 to ensure that the maximum amount of federal funds are matched.

Patients who come to our health centers can receive primary care, dental, and behavioral health care all on the same day in the same building. In 2018, Connecticut's health centers provided care to nearly 400,000 state residents—more than 10% of our population. Among these patients were over 15,000 residents considered to be homeless, and 48% of our patients have income at or below 100% of the federal poverty level. Reinstating the State Loan Repayment Program will help health centers maintain a robust workforce to continue serving Connecticut's most vulnerable populations.

Connecticut's primary care workforce is on the decline, and health centers in particular are losing their ability to recruit and retain care providers. Employment of family and general practitioners, internists, and pediatricians has declined since 2014, and we see similar declines in dentistry and behavioral health. The State Loan Repayment Program would provide an incentive for providers not only to enter high-demand fields, but also to work in community health where they would be serving communities that need their services the most.

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<sup>1</sup> CGS19a-7d



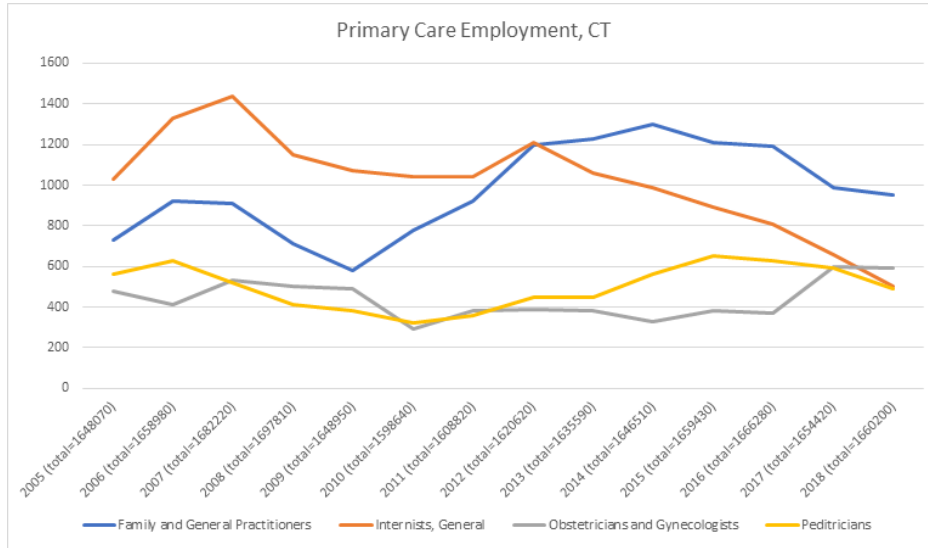
## Proposed legislative language:

Add New Section. Sec. 19a-7d is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (Effective July 1, 2020):

(a) The Commissioner of Public Health [may] shall establish, within available appropriations, a program to provide three-year grants to community-based providers of primary care services in order to expand access to health care for the uninsured. The grants may be awarded to community-based providers of primary care for (1) funding for direct services, (2) recruitment and retention of primary care clinicians and registered nurses through subsidizing of salaries or through a loan repayment program, and (3) capital expenditures. The community-based providers of primary care under the direct service program shall provide, or arrange access to, primary and preventive services, referrals to specialty services, including rehabilitative and mental health services, inpatient care, prescription drugs, basic diagnostic laboratory services, health education and outreach to alert people to the availability of services. Primary care clinicians and registered nurses participating in the state loan repayment program or receiving subsidies shall provide services to the uninsured based on a sliding fee schedule, provide free care if necessary, accept Medicare assignment and participate as Medicaid providers, or provide nursing services in school-based health centers and expanded school health sites, as such terms are defined in section 19a-6r. The commissioner may adopt regulations, in accordance with the provisions of chapter 54, to establish eligibility criteria, services to be provided by participants, the sliding fee schedule, reporting requirements and the loan repayment program. For the purposes of this section, "primary care clinicians" includes family practice physicians, general practice osteopaths, obstetricians and gynecologists, internal medicine physicians, pediatricians, dentists, certified nurse midwives, advanced practice registered nurses, registered nurses, substance use counselors, pharmacists, mental health counselors, physician assistants and dental hygienists.

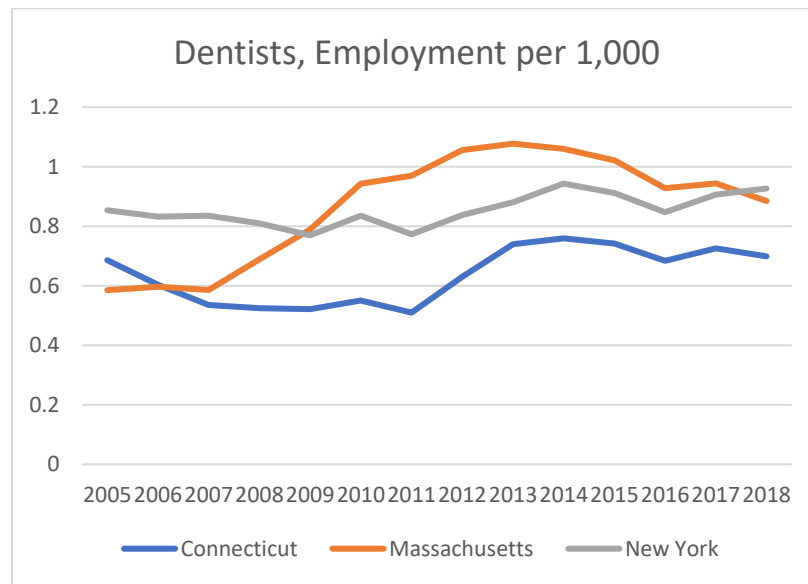
Thank you for your time and consideration to his important matter. I would be happy to answer any questions or provide you with additional information.

## Trends in Primary care Employment:



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## Dental employment: Connecticut and neighboring states

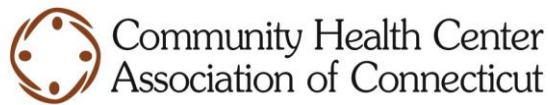


<sup>2</sup> Data pulled from the Bureau of Labor Statistics

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### About the National Health Service Corps' State Loan Repayment Program<sup>3</sup>:

The State Loan Repayment Program provides matching federal contributions to state loan repayment for healthcare providers who are US citizens or nationals, licensed to practice in the grantee state, and work in Health Provider Shortage Areas. All funds that go towards this program are exempt from federal income and employment taxes.

To qualify for the State Loan Repayment Program, 4 main criteria must be met.

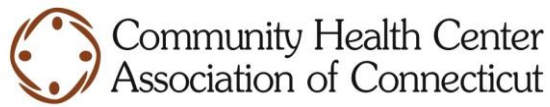
1. Location: grantee must be one of the 50 states, or on a short list of other eligible entities
2. Matching Funds:
  - a. State must match or exceed federal contributions towards the SLRP
  - b. Matching funds cannot come from federal sources; federal funds cannot be used to cover SLRP administrative costs
    - i. Can be provided by state apportionments, state education loan repayment programs, donations from eligible service sites, private foundations, or community organizations, as long as none of this money comes from a federal source
3. Administration: Must be managed by a state agency
4. Use of Federal Funds: Federal funds received through SLRP must be used to make loan repayment awards
  - a. State/territory share of funds can be used to repay qualifying loans of health professionals, administrative costs of the SLRP grant, or a combination of both.

The program also has some restrictions. A State Loan Repayment Plan cannot:

1. Be awarded to people already benefiting from a previous state loan repayment program unless they complete their state obligation first
2. Operate under terms more favorable than the NHSC Loan Repayment Program, although it could:
  - a. Fund different disciplines
  - b. Fund certain types of practice sites (although employment in a Health Provider Shortage Area is required)
  - c. Vary the length of the service commitment required (although a minimum of two years is required)

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<sup>3</sup> <https://nhsc.hrsa.gov/loan-repayment/state-loan-repayment-program/application-requirements.html#location>



**State Loan Repayment Program Detail<sup>4</sup>**

State	Number of Programs	Commitment Length (years)	Maximum Repayment
Alaska	1	3	Varies
Arizona	1	2	40,000
California	2	3; 2	50,000
Colorado	1	3	90,000
Delaware	1	Full-time	100,000
Georgia	1	Full-time	100,000
Hawaii	1	2 years	Varies
Idaho	1	2 years	Varies
Iowa	1	Up to 5 years	200,000
Kansas	2	N/A/N/A	25,000/year/ 26,000
Kentucky	1		
Louisiana	1		
Maine	1		
Massachusetts	1		50,000
Michigan	1	2 years	200,000
Minnesota	2	2 years/4 years/4 years	40000/100,000/100,000
Missouri	1	2 years	50,000
Montana	1		100,000
Nebraska	1		40,000
Nevada	1	full-time	Varies
New Hampshire	1		75,000
New Jersey	1	2 years	
New Mexico	1	Full-time	25,000 per year
New York	2	2 years/5 years	20,000/150,000
Oklahoma	2	Set up a full-time practice	160,000/40,000
Oregon	1		35,000 per year
Pennsylvania	1		100,000
Rhode Island	2		80,000/varies
Texas	2	4 years/4 years	160,000/30,000
Utah	1	2 years	30,000
Vermont	1	2 years	20,000
Virginia	1		
Washington	2	2 years	70,000
Wisconsin	1		100,000
Wyoming	1	3 years	90,000

<sup>4</sup> Based on a survey of 35 states using data from <https://thecollegeinvestor.com/student-loan-forgiveness-programs-by-state/>