



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:

My name is Stephanie Pagliuca, and I am the Senior Director of Workforce Development and Recruitment with Bi-State Primary Care Association. I am pleased to testify in support of SB 403 and respectfully request the committee pass this bill that is critical to New Hampshire's ability to attract, retain and grow the next generation of health professionals for our state.

Bi-State is a nonprofit organization focused on advancing access to comprehensive primary care and preventive services for all, with special emphasis on those most in need in New Hampshire and Vermont. Bi-State's members include community health centers, federally qualified health centers (FQHCs), New Hampshire Area Health Education Center programs, clinics for the uninsured, networks, and consortia. Today, Bi-State represents 26 member organizations that provide comprehensive primary care services to over 314,000 patients at 169 locations.

Since 1994, Bi-State has run the state's only non-profit Recruitment Center to help communities attract and recruit primary care physicians, dentists, physician assistants, nurse practitioners, and masters-level behavioral health and substance use disorder treatment providers. The Recruitment Center's services are available to any practice in the state although we specialize in recruitment to practices that serve the needs of medically underserved areas and populations. Our services have helped 100+ organizations across the state to recruit more than 675 clinicians. We regularly assist rural hospitals, community health centers, community mental health centers, and private practices with their recruitment needs.

Even before the pandemic, New Hampshire competed nationally for a pool of health professionals to provide essential primary care services to our residents. There are not enough of these critical providers being trained in New Hampshire to meet the needs across the state. In fact, most of the training programs we have are centered in larger communities in southern New Hampshire which does not offer the students any training in smaller practices and rural communities where their services are most needed after they graduate.

Speaking from my 30 years of experience at the Recruitment Center, I am pleased that the New Hampshire legislature is considering SB 403 because it contains effective approaches to support our state's current workforce and strengthens our workforce pipeline in the long-term. It is essential that New Hampshire has these solutions in place to address the pressures from workforce shortages in the health care industry that have reached a level of crisis. These staffing shortages, which now extend across both clinical and non-clinical positions, severely limit the ability of a health care organizations to meet the needs of their patients and the communities they serve.

Since 2023 New Hampshire's 10 community health centers have seen an average of 42% increase in the number of vacancies for positions across the board, with certain vacancies increasing substantially. From 2023 to 2024 health centers saw substantial increases for the following positions: Front Desk/Patient Services (238%); Medical Assistants (128%); Registered Nurses (70%); Advanced

Registered Nurse Practitioners and Physician Assistants (50%); Behavioral Health Clinicians (295%); Psychiatrists (700%); and Family Physicians (250%). The openings among just these 10 organizations alone underscores the critical need to formalize and expand health care workforce pipeline and incentive programs in the state.

The funding requested in SB 403 supports a national marketing and outreach campaign that is coordinated through Bi-State's Recruitment Center. Our team helps health professionals who are considering working in New Hampshire to identify a practice location and community where their professional and personal interests can be met. The program is specifically designed to attract primary care physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, dentists, dental hygienists, psychiatrists, and mental health and substance use disorder treatment professionals to our state.

Through our contract with the State, the Recruitment Center added a digital media strategy to our outreach in 2023. The campaign reaches significantly more individuals monthly than our recruiters can through important, yet traditional, methods. In the *VITAL to New Hampshire* campaign, health professionals see information about the benefits of practicing in New Hampshire while they go about their daily business online. The information is viewed in Google Ads and in mobile apps on smartphones and tablets.

The digital medica campaign has been successful: In November 2023 alone, our ads were viewed 2.62 million times. This led more than 12,400 new visitors to the campaign website: <https://newhampshirehealthcarejobs.com/>. Seven percent of the traffic on the campaign website during this period were return visitors. These health professionals are getting more serious about practicing in New Hampshire as a direct result of our digital media work. The Recruitment Center has systems, recruiters and resources in place to convert online viewers into actionable leads who can be matched with practices across the state for their hiring consideration.

Other critical investments proposed in SB 403 include: the expansion of the State Loan Repayment Program to offset student loan payments for health care professionals; provisions for certification and reimbursement of Community Health Workers; funding for the NH Area Health Education Centers (AHECs) to increase the number of entry- level clinical staff and career ladder trainings; and investing in a Family Medicine Residency Program in New Hampshire's rural North Country – the only family medicine residency program north of Concord. You will hear from subject matter experts who will discuss why these investments in pipeline programs are necessary, and critical to ensure continued access to primary and preventive health care services and protect the lives of Granite Staters.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our almost 30 years of experience in recruiting and retaining health professionals for the state. I respectfully request that this committee pass SB 403. The strategies in the bill will have a positive impact on the health care workforce and access to care in our state today and in the years to come. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



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