



Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee

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61st Montana Legislature

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June 11, 2010

Keith Kelly, Commissioner
Department of Labor and Industry
PO Box 1728
Helena, MT 59624-1728

Dear Commissioner Kelly:

During the past year, our committee has been conducting a study of health care as authorized by Senate Joint Resolution 35 in the 2009 session. A significant part of the study has focused on issues involving the health care workforce.

We've learned that Montana is already experiencing shortages of some types of health care providers, particularly those who provide primary care to patients. The federal health care legislation that will extend insurance coverage to thousands of Montanans over the next several years is expected to create an even greater demand for health care providers, including primary care physicians, physician assistants, and advanced practice registered nurses.

The state currently appropriates money to help a limited number of Montana students attend medical schools in other states, and it also provides incentives such as loan repayments to physicians who practice in rural areas. Committee members have heard testimony in the past year about the possible need to increase state support in these and other areas, to help alleviate current and potential shortages. At the same time, we've also heard that targeting state support most appropriately is difficult, because little specific data exists about our health care workforce.

The committee believes the Legislature, the Montana University System, and state agencies could better plan for and support health care workforce programs if the licensing boards within the Department of Labor and Industry collected certain data as they issue or renew licenses in the health care professions. The information could be provided to other state entities to analyze and use in developing programs that will meet the state's workforce needs. The committee believes collection of the following types of information would help in this planning process:

- whether a licensee is currently practicing and if so, whether the person is working full time or part time;
- the city or town in which the licensee is employed and whether the person is employed primarily in a hospital, private practice, community health center, or other setting;
- whether the licensee is accepting new patients;
- whether the licensee accepts Medicaid and Medicare patients; and
- when the licensee is planning to retire.

This information would be useful for many types of health care professions and is particularly

important for those primary care professions that are likely to be impacted most significantly by health care reform, including dentistry.

Committee members recognize that collecting this data may place additional administrative costs on the licensing boards. However, we believe the boards have the ability to address this by adjusting the licensing fees through administrative rule, if necessary.

Thus on behalf of the Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee, I would like to ask you to consider making this data collection a routine part of the professional licensing and renewal process. If you would like to discuss this matter in more depth with the Committee at a future meeting, I'd be happy to schedule time on the agenda. The committee will meet on June 28 and on Aug. 23-24. Please contact our committee staff, Sue O'Connell, at 444-3597 if you would like to discuss this further.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rep. Diane Sands
Presiding Officer

c: Mike Cooney
Jeannie Worsch
Maggie Connor

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