

By: Representative Creekmore IV

To: Public Health and Human
Services; Appropriations A

HOUSE BILL NO. 593

1 AN ACT TO CREATE THE RURAL PHYSICIANS RETENTION LOAN
2 REPAYMENT PROGRAM; TO PRESCRIBE ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR LOAN
3 REPAYMENT UNDER THE PROGRAM, INCLUDING EMPLOYMENT AT CERTAIN RURAL
4 HOSPITALS AND CLINICS; TO AUTHORIZE UP TO FIVE ANNUAL AWARDS
5 PAYABLE TO A RECIPIENT'S LENDER UPON COMPLETION OF EACH YEAR AT A
6 QUALIFYING HOSPITAL OR CLINIC; TO REQUIRE THE POSTSECONDARY
7 EDUCATION FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE BOARD TO ADMINISTER THE PROGRAM; TO
8 ESTABLISH THE RURAL PHYSICIAN RETENTION LOAN REPAYMENT PROGRAM IN
9 THE STATE TREASURY; TO BRING FORWARD SECTIONS 37-144-1 THROUGH
10 37-144-21, MISSISSIPPI CODE OF 1972, WHICH CREATE THE MISSISSIPPI
11 RURAL PHYSICIANS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM, FOR PURPOSES OF POSSIBLE
12 AMENDMENT; AND FOR RELATED PURPOSES.

13 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MISSISSIPPI:

14 **SECTION 1.** (1) There is established the "Rural Physicians
15 Retention Loan Repayment Program" for physicians serving in rural
16 hospitals in Mississippi.

17 (2) An eligible applicant for an initial award must:

18 (a) Be a legal resident of the State of Mississippi;

19 (b) Have gained employment or secured contractual work
20 as a fulltime physician at:

21 (i) A general acute care hospital within a super
22 rural ZIP code, as designated by the Centers for Medicare and



Medicaid Services, or a clinic affiliated with a general acute care hospital within a super rural ZIP code;

(ii) A Rural Emergency Hospital (REH), as designated by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, or a clinic affiliated with a Rural Emergency Hospital;

(iii) A Critical Access Hospital (CAH), as designated by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, or a clinic affiliated with a Critical Access Hospital; or

(iv) A general acute care hospital or an affiliated clinic in Bolivar, Coahoma, Carroll, Holmes, Humphreys, Issaquena, Leflore, Panola, Quitman, Sharkey, Sunflower, Tallahatchie, Tate, Tunica, Washington or Yazoo Counties;

(c) Possess a current unencumbered license from the State Board of Medical Licensure; and

(d) Possess outstanding qualifying educational loans received at any point during the recipient's postsecondary educational career, which may include the principal, interest and related expenses, such as the required interest premium on the unpaid balances of government and commercial loans obtained by the recipient for educational expense.

(3) The hospital or clinic where a recipient is serving must be located in the State of Mississippi and licensed by the State Department of Health. The hospital or clinic where the recipient is serving may not be in a metropolitan statistical area, as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau.



(4) Subject to the availability of funds, annual awards for eligible recipients who are employed at a hospital or affiliated clinic described under subsections (2) and (3) of this section ("qualifying hospital") are as follows:

(a) Twenty Thousand Dollars (\$20,000.00) for the initial award;

(b) Twenty-five Thousand Dollars (\$25,000.00) for the second award;

(c) Thirty Thousand Dollars (\$30,000.00) for the third award;

(d) Thirty-five Thousand Dollars (\$35,000.00) for the fourth award; and

(e) Forty Thousand Dollars (\$40,000.00) for the fifth award.

(5) In order to be eligible to receive an award established in subsection (4) for the next succeeding year, a recipient must retain eligibility during each year of the program.

(6) Persons who have received funds from a state forgivable loan program established under the laws of this state or who are in default or delinquent on a federal, state, local or commercial qualifying educational loan are not eligible for the program.

(7) Initial recipients in the program will be selected on a first-come, first-served basis from all eligible applicants, subject to the availability of funds. However, priority consideration must be given to:



(a) Recent graduates of a school of medicine accredited by the State of Mississippi;

(b) Students enrolled in a medical school in this state on July 1, 2025;

(c) Students and physicians who are participating in the Mississippi Rural Physicians Scholarship Program created under Section 37-144-1 on July 1, 2025, but only if the Mississippi Rural Physicians Scholarship Commission and the Postsecondary Education Financial Assistance Board enter into an agreement providing for an equitable transition from the Mississippi Rural Physicians Scholarship Program to the Rural Physicians Retention Loan Repayment Program which fairly addresses all rights and obligations of a particular recipient and the state; and

(d) Licensed physicians practicing in a qualifying hospital or clinic that has not been a beneficiary of the program for the three (3) preceding years.

(8) Notwithstanding any other provision of this section to the contrary, the Postsecondary Education Financial Assistance Board may limit the acceptance of applications and limit the number of awards for any fiscal year.

(9) A recipient may not be penalized for ending employment at one (1) qualifying hospital or clinic if the recipient begins working at another qualifying hospital or clinic during the same year for which the award was given.



97 (10) Awards are granted to eligible recipients on an annual
98 basis. A recipient who fails to retain eligibility may not
99 receive subsequent awards authorized under subsection (4) of this
100 section.

101 (11) Upon completion of each year for which an award was
102 granted, the applicable award for that year will be paid to the
103 recipient's lender or loan service provider to be applied to the
104 outstanding balance of the recipient's loans. Monies paid by the
105 recipient or on the recipient's behalf toward qualifying
106 educational loans before the payment of an award are not eligible
107 for reimbursement through the program.

108 (12) During the employment year for which an award is
109 granted, a recipient must at all times keep the Postsecondary
110 Education Financial Assistance Board informed of any changes to
111 the recipient's current, correct and complete employment or
112 contract information and status.

113 (13) Recipients who fail to maintain a current unencumbered
114 license from the State Board of Medical Licensure or to fulfill
115 the year of employment or contractual work on which an award was
116 based forfeit all rights to that award.

117 (14) The Postsecondary Education Financial Assistance Board,
118 in collaboration with the State Board of Medical Licensure and any
119 other state agency determined applicable by the Postsecondary
120 Education Financial Assistance Board, shall track each recipient
121 of an award under the program through the sixth year after the



recipient receives an initial award unless the recipient leaves employment at a qualifying hospital or clinic at an earlier date. Data collected must include each recipient's place of employment and any other pertinent information necessary to determine the efficacy of the program in retaining physicians employed in rural hospitals and clinics in the state.

(15) The Postsecondary Education Financial Assistance Board shall promulgate rules and regulations necessary for the proper administration of the program, including rules for ensuring that the expenses of the program during a fiscal year do not exceed funding available for the program in that fiscal year.

(16) There is established in the State Treasury a special fund to be designated the "Rural Physician Retention Loan Repayment Program Fund", into which are deposited those funds appropriated by the Legislature and any other funds that may be made available for the purpose of implementing the loan repayment program established under this section. Money in the fund at the end of a fiscal year may not lapse into the General Fund, and interest earned on any amounts deposited into the fund must be credited to the special fund.

SECTION 2. Section 37-144-1, Mississippi Code of 1972, is brought forward as follows:

37-144-1. There is established the Mississippi Rural Physicians Scholarship Program for the purpose of identifying and recruiting qualified university and college students for medical



or osteopathic school matriculation. The program shall consist of three (3) distinct phases through which participants will progress, including:

- (a) Undergraduate premedical education;
- (b) Medical or osteopathic school and residency; and
- (c) Post-residency entry into medical practice in a rural or underserved area of the State of Mississippi.

SECTION 3. Section 37-144-3, Mississippi Code of 1972, is brought forward as follows:

37-144-3. (1) The Mississippi Rural Physicians Scholarship Program shall be administered by a commission to be known as the "Mississippi Rural Physicians Scholarship Commission." The commission shall be directed by a board composed of the following members:

(a) Two (2) generalist physicians appointed by and from the membership of the Mississippi State Medical Association, the term of which shall be three (3) years and may be reappointed for one (1) additional term;

(b) One (1) generalist physician appointed by and from the membership of each of the following organizations, the term of which shall be three (3) years and may be reappointed for one (1) additional term:

(i) Mississippi Academy of Family Physicians;

(ii) Mississippi Chapter, American College of Physicians;



(iii) Mississippi Chapter, American Academy of
Pediatrics;

(iv) Mississippi Chapter, American College of
OB-GYN;

(v) Mississippi Psychiatric Association;

(vi) Mississippi Medical and Surgical Association;

(vii) Mississippi Osteopathic Association;

(c) Two (2) designees of the Dean of the University of
Mississippi School of Medicine whose terms are at the discretion
of the dean, at least one (1) of whom is a member of the
University of Mississippi School of Medicine Admissions Committee;

(d) Two (2) medical students, one (1) of whom shall be
selected yearly through a process developed by the Dean of the
School of Medicine in consultation with the Chairs of the
Departments of Family Medicine, Internal Medicine, OB-GYN and
Pediatrics, and one (1) of whom shall be nominated for a one-year
term by the Mississippi Chapter of the Student National Medical
Association and approved by the Dean of the University of
Mississippi School of Medicine;

(e) A member of the Board of Trustees of State
Institutions of Higher Learning;

(f) The Chair of the Department of Family Medicine at
the University of Mississippi School of Medicine; and

(g) A licensed psychiatrist appointed by the
Mississippi Chapter of the American Psychiatric Association.



197 (2) The premedical advisors from the accredited four-year
198 colleges and universities in the state and the directors or
199 designees of the primary care generalist training programs in the
200 State of Mississippi shall comprise an advisory committee to the
201 commission to assist the commission in its administration of the
202 Mississippi Rural Physicians Scholarship Program.

203 (3) Vacancies on the commission must be filled in a manner
204 consistent with the original appointments.

205 (4) All appointments to the commission must be made no later
206 than September 1, 2024. After the members are appointed, the
207 Chair of the Department of Family Medicine shall set a date for
208 the organizational meeting that is mutually acceptable to the
209 majority of the commission members. The organizational meeting
210 shall be for the purposes of organizing the commission and
211 establishing rules for transacting its business. A majority of
212 the members of the commission shall constitute a quorum at all
213 commission meetings. An affirmative vote of a majority of the
214 members present and voting shall be required in the adoption of
215 rules, reports and in any other actions taken by the commission.
216 At the organizational meeting, the commission shall elect a chair
217 and vice chair from the members appointed according to paragraphs
218 (a) through (d) of subsection (1). The chair shall serve for a
219 term of two (2) years, upon the expiration of which the vice chair
220 shall assume the office of chair.



(5) After the organizational meeting, the commission shall hold no less than two (2) meetings annually.

(6) The commission may form an executive committee for the purpose of transacting business that must be conducted before the next regularly scheduled meeting of the commission. All actions taken by the executive committee must be ratified by the commission at its next regularly scheduled meeting.

(7) Members of the commission shall serve without compensation but may be reimbursed, subject to the availability of funding, for mileage and actual and necessary expenses incurred in attending meetings of the commission.

(8) Funding for the establishment and continued operation of the program and commission shall be appropriated out of any money in the General Fund not already appropriated to the University of Mississippi Medical Center.

SECTION 4. Section 37-144-5, Mississippi Code of 1972, is brought forward as follows:

37-144-5. The Mississippi Rural Physicians Scholarship Commission shall have the following powers and duties:

(a) Developing the administrative policy for the commission and the Mississippi Rural Physicians Scholarship Program;

(b) Promulgating rules and regulations, with the advice and consent of the University of Mississippi Medical Center, pertaining to the implementation and operation of the Rural Physicians Scholarship Program;



(c) Developing and implementing strategies and activities for the identification and recruitment of students and for marketing the program and for the implementation of the program. In developing these strategies, the board shall seek the input of various organizations and entities, including the Mississippi State Medical Association, the Mississippi Academy of Family Physicians, the Mississippi Chapters of the American College of Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of OB-GYN, Mississippi Psychiatric Association, the Mississippi Medical and Surgical Association, the Mississippi Osteopathic Medicine Association and the American Psychiatric Association;

(d) Establishing a budget, with the advice and consent of the University of Mississippi Medical Center, to support the activities of the program and periodically reviewing and if appropriate, revising, the scholarship and other stipends offered through the program;

(e) Advising the University of Mississippi Medical Center regarding hiring an executive director and support staff necessary for the commission's work. The commission shall nominate at least two (2) individuals to serve as executive director;

(f) Reviewing participants' progress in the program and mentoring students and physicians participating in the program;



(g) Developing and participating in programs that provide initial practice support in collaboration with other interested professional organizations;

(h) The commission shall have the authority through use of generally applicable definitions, to designate an area of the state as underserved or rural. The method by which these designations shall be made shall be contained in rules and regulations promulgated by the commission.

(i) The commission shall produce an annual report to the Legislature showing certain information relating to the program for the previous fiscal year, including the following:

(i) Budget, including funds provided in addition to legislative appropriations;

(ii) Number of participants enrolled in medical or osteopathic school along with their matriculation status;

(iii) The status of, to include location of practice, participants who have entered a medicine or other generalist residency program;

(iv) The number and cause of participants who breached their obligation(s) to the program; and

(v) The status of, to include location of practice, participants who have entered into the practice of medicine in a rural or medically underserved area in Mississippi.

SECTION 5. Section 37-144-7, Mississippi Code of 1972, is brought forward as follows:



37-144-7. (1) The commission shall develop and implement policies and procedures designed to recruit, identify and enroll undergraduate students who demonstrate necessary interest, commitment, aptitude and academic achievement to pursue careers as family physicians, psychiatrists, child psychiatrists or other generalist physicians in rural or medically underserved areas of Mississippi, and to develop and implement the programs designed to foster successful entry of participants into medical school, completion of medical school, enrollment into and completion of family medicine or other generalist residency, and establishment and maintenance of a career in family medicine, psychiatrist, child psychiatry or other generalist specialty in a rural or underserved area of Mississippi.

(2) The commission shall have the authority through use of generally applicable definitions to designate an area of the state as underserved or rural.

(3) The commission, in conjunction with the University of Mississippi Medical Center, shall have the authority to provide students selected for scholarship funding with faculty mentors and other programs designed to enhance the students' likelihood of admission to the medical school. The commission and the University of Mississippi Medical Center will develop coursework that will provide scholarship students with the skills necessary for sustained and successful medical practice in rural Mississippi.



319 (4) Each applicant for admission to the program must submit
320 an application to the commission that conforms to requirements
321 established by the commission.

322 (5) In selecting participants for the program, the board may
323 only accept an applicant if his or her academic record and other
324 characteristics, if given consideration by the University of
325 Mississippi School of Medicine Admissions Committee, would be
326 considered credible and competitive.

327 (6) An applicant for the program may be admitted only upon a
328 majority vote of the members of the commission.

329 (7) Not less than fifteen (15) students will be admitted to
330 the Mississippi Rural Physicians Scholarship Program each year,
331 provided that there are fifteen (15) or more qualified applicants
332 for the program.

333 (8) Upon the funding of sixty-one (61) or more rural
334 physicians scholarships by the Legislature and recognizing the
335 importance of balancing the needs of comprehensive primary care
336 along with a critical shortage of psychiatrists in Mississippi,
337 the commission may grant an exception for fourth-year medical or
338 osteopathic school (M4) students who demonstrate a desire to
339 practice psychiatry in rural Mississippi and who use a practice
340 model and enter the practice of medicine in a rural or underserved
341 area in Mississippi, as defined by the commission, beginning for
342 the M4 Class of 2020.



SECTION 6. Section 37-144-9, Mississippi Code of 1972, is brought forward as follows:

37-144-9. (1) Participants must adhere to the policies and practices as stipulated by the commission to continue in the program.

(2) Students in the program may receive tuition or other financial support that may be provided by the commission. If a student in the program is admitted to and completes medical or osteopathic school, any tuition or other educational and living support provided to the student by the commission will be forgiven. However, if the student is not successful in being accepted into medical or osteopathic school within three (3) years of entry into the Mississippi Rural Physicians Scholarship Program, or if the student otherwise breaches his or her agreement with the commission, all financial assistance provided to the student must be repaid according to policies adopted by the board.

SECTION 7. Section 37-144-11, Mississippi Code of 1972, is brought forward as follows:

37-144-11. (1) Students in the program may apply to any medical or osteopathic school that is accredited by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME) or the American Osteopathic Association (AOA).

(2) Students in the program seeking admission to the University of Mississippi School of Medicine shall be eligible for a special admissions process pursuant to criteria established by



the School of Medicine Admissions Committee which will include special consideration of the attributes of participation in the program.

(3) In carrying out the admissions process developed for the Mississippi Rural Physicians Scholarship Program participants under this section, the goal is for the program to work with the School of Medicine to enhance the capability of participants to successfully enter and complete medical school, train in family medicine or other generalist primary care specialty and enter practice in rural or underserved areas in Mississippi. To the extent feasible, the early admissions process should be completed before November 1 of the year preceding a student's admission to medical school.

SECTION 8. Section 37-144-13, Mississippi Code of 1972, is brought forward as follows:

37-144-13. (1) Subject to the availability of funding, students in the program who successfully matriculate to medical or osteopathic school are eligible for ongoing financial support in accordance with policies and requirements of the commission and in accordance with the applicable laws and regulations. The number of students to be supported at the University of Mississippi School of Medicine and at other schools will be established by policy prescribed by the commission.

(2) Subject to the availability of funding, students enrolled at a medical or osteopathic school in Mississippi may



393 receive tuition support, funding to assist with the cost of books
394 and a living stipend, as prescribed by policy of the commission
395 and in accordance with applicable regulations. Preferences for
396 ongoing funding must be given to those students admitted to the
397 University of Mississippi School of Medicine.

398 (3) For each year that a student in medical or osteopathic
399 school receives financial assistance, the student is obligated for
400 one (1) year of practice as a primary care physician in a rural or
401 underserved area in Mississippi. Breach of the agreement at any
402 stage of training shall invoke the repayment of all financial
403 assistance provided to the student through the Mississippi Rural
404 Physicians Scholarship Program, including assistance provided
405 during undergraduate school, as well as in medical or osteopathic
406 school, along with other penalties that may be prescribed in
407 policy by the commission.

408 **SECTION 9.** Section 37-144-15, Mississippi Code of 1972, is
409 brought forward as follows:

410 37-144-15. Medical and osteopathic students in the program
411 must enter family medicine or other generalist residency programs
412 according to their choice of specialty. Depending upon the
413 availability of funds, students who successfully enter residency
414 programs which have been approved by the commission may receive
415 further financial support from the Mississippi Rural Physicians
416 Scholarship Program subject to applicable rules and policies of
417 the commission. All funding for financial support from the



commission to participants during their residency must be disbursed in accordance with applicable regulations.

SECTION 10. Section 37-144-17, Mississippi Code of 1972, is brought forward as follows:

37-144-17. (1) Upon completion of residency, a participant in the Mississippi Rural Physicians Scholarship Program must proceed to enter the practice of medicine in a rural or underserved area in Mississippi, as defined by the commission and consistent with generally acceptable designations. If an area experiences significant changes in its medical or general community which are not reflected by health professional shortage area (HPSA) or medically underserved area (MUA) rural designation, the commission may receive testimony and, in its discretion, may qualify the area as an underserved or rural area to allow the program participant to fulfill his or her practice obligation.

(2) Upon entering the practice of medicine, a participant in the program must serve in a health professional shortage area (HPSA), medically underserved area (MUA), or rural area otherwise approved for practice under subsection (1) of this section for a number of years which corresponds to the number of years, not to exceed five (5), for which the participant received funding through the program. A participant who completes residency who fails to enter the practice of medicine as required under this section shall be deemed in breach of contract and shall be liable for the immediate repayment of all financial assistance provided



to the participant through the Mississippi Rural Physicians Scholarship Program, including assistance provided during undergraduate school, as well as in medical or osteopathic school, along with other penalties that may be prescribed in policy by the board. Any participant who fails to complete the period of practice for which he or she is obligated to provide services in a health professional shortage area (HPSA) or a medically underserved area (MUA) in exchange for financial assistance received through the Mississippi Rural Physicians Scholarship Program shall be liable for the repayment of all financial assistance provided to the participant through the program, along with other penalties that may be prescribed by the commission, an amount which shall be reduced on a pro rata basis for actual years of practice by the physician in the area designated by the commission.

SECTION 11. Section 37-144-19, Mississippi Code of 1972, is brought forward as follows:

37-144-19. The Mississippi Rural Physicians Scholarship Program, acting through the commission, shall make every effort to establish an initial practice entry support system for participants in the program.

SECTION 12. Section 37-144-21, Mississippi Code of 1972, is brought forward as follows:

37-144-21. This chapter may not be construed as granting the Mississippi Rural Physicians Scholarship Program or its governing



468 commission any governing or administrative authority over any
469 program administered by any college, university, medical school or
470 residency program in this state or any other program established
471 by state law.

472 **SECTION 13.** This act shall take effect and be in force from
473 and after July 1, 2025.

