



# Joint Subcommittee On Postsecondary Education Policy and Budget

## 60<sup>TH</sup> Montana Legislature

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## **HJR 22 STUDY RESOLUTION**

### **INCENTIVES AND PAYBACK FOR DENTAL STUDENTS**

#### **AN INTERIM STUDY ASSIGNED TO THE PEPB**

##### Background Staff Report

September 25, 2007

Since 1975 Montana has participated in the interstate professional student exchange programs known as WICHE and WWAMI<sup>1</sup>, where state funding subsidizes the tuition costs for Montana resident students to attend post-graduate professional education programs in other states that have these higher education programs that Montana does not, including medical and dental schools.

In the field of dentistry, the state budget funds 12 Montana students each year, at a state support cost of \$247,200 in FY 2008, to attend dental school through the WWAMI program and the Minnesota dental program.<sup>2</sup>

The primary public policy goals of the professional student exchange program are:

- To provide state financial assistance that supports expanded postsecondary educational opportunities for Montana resident students in academic and professional education fields that are not available through the Montana University System or private colleges in Montana. Rather than build a medical or dental school, it is considered more cost effective to subsidize resident students to access out-of-state institutions
- To increase the number of professional practitioners in critical professions in Montana where there is a shortage of these practitioners in many parts of the state

In addition to the professional student exchange programs, to address the shortage of rural physicians in Montana the Montana Rural Physicians Incentive Program (MRPIP), codified at 20-26-1501, MCA, was created to provide student loan repayment incentives. No such incentive program exists for dental professionals.

## **HB 522 Study**

During the 2005 regular session of the legislature, HB 522 was passed and approved in order to “conduct a feasibility study concerning the training of Montana dental students at MSU – Bozeman and the University of Washington.”

The 52-page report from that study projects a convergence between a growing shortage of dental professionals in Montana that will be confronting both a growing overall population in the state together with an older population that has a particularly high demand for dental care. In many rural areas of the state, the lack of available dental care is most acute, concludes this report.

To address this situation, the HB 522 study recommended developing the Regional Initiatives in Dental Education (RIDE) program in Montana. RIDE was designed to address the critical need for dental professionals by expanding dental education opportunities at MSU – Bozeman as part of the WWAMI partnership with the University of Washington, as well as expanding community-based clinical rotations for dental students across Montana. As a result, there would be 8 additional dental student slots for Montana students to pursue a dental education. All of these RIDE components are aimed toward bringing more dental professionals to Montana to practice dentistry and increase the level of dental care across the state.

As a result of the HB 522 study, completed in late 2006, HB 395 was introduced at the 2007 regular session of the legislature.

## **HB 395 results**

This legislation would have fully fund the RIDE proposal from the HB 522 study at a cost of \$2.4 million general fund in the 2009 biennium, and projected ongoing general fund costs of \$1.7 million in 2010 and \$1.8 million in 2011.

Ultimately, HB 395 did not pass the legislature and there was extensive discussion about the level of certainty that the RIDE program as proposed would indeed create an increase of dental professionals in Montana and improve access to dental care for underserved populations. Amendments to HB 395 also addressed concerns that RIDE students may not practice dentistry in Montana unless there was a “clawback” provision that would require RIDE graduates to repay the state support paid on their behalf if they did not return to Montana to practice dentistry.

Therefore, the legislature did not fund the RIDE program but did approve HJR 22 with the intention of identifying additional program options that may better ensure that a RIDE program in Montana would indeed increase the number of dental professionals practicing in Montana.

## **HJR 22 intent**

HJR 22 seeks more data and certainty that specific state government efforts to create programs (e.g. student loan repayment, tax credits, dental student tuition support, RIDE, etc.) would have a high degree of success in addressing the critical needs for dental professionals to meet the need for dental care in Montana communities, in particular the most underserved rural communities.

## **Statement of the question in HJR 22**

Given that certain rural geographic areas of Montana are currently underserved in the area of dental care and that the demographic trends indicate that this problem is very likely to get worse in those rural areas and become a larger problem in many other Montana communities; what can state government do to increase the number of dental professionals practicing in Montana in order to increase access to dental

care for all Montanans, with a particular focus on those populations in the most underserved rural communities?

### **HJR 22 study deliverables**

The working group is charged with submitting a report to the PEPB by June 2008 that includes recommendations in the following areas:

- Specific initiatives that would increase the supply of dental care professionals in Montana with a focus on rural and underserved areas
- Repayment programs that would require dental students receiving state funding support for their dental education to reimburse the State of Montana all or some portion of those funds
- Dental student loan forgiveness programs that would be administered by the Office of the Commissioner of Higher Education
- PEPB will then report to the Education and Local Government interim committee, including any recommendations or action items

Therefore, while the second and third items above require attention to specifics, the first bullet allows for a broad scope of ideas to be considered for recommendation, provided that these recommendations “increase access to dental care within the state by attracting and retaining dentists.”

### **Proposed Appointees that Meet HJR 22 Requirements**

- Jack Kane, MT Dept. of Labor and Industry
- Margaret Virag, MT Dept. of Health & Human Services
- Mary McCue, Executive Director, MT Dental Assoc.
- Dr. Linda Hyman, Vice Provost/WWAMI Director, MSU - Bozeman
- Pat Wise, Governor’s Office of Economic Development
- Rep. William Jones, Doctor of Dental Science

Alan G. Peura  
Fiscal Analyst II  
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<sup>1</sup> WICHE is the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, of which Montana is a member, which enables Montana students to enroll in 8 professional graduate studies and professional programs in 13 participating states at reduced tuition rates as the State of Montana pays negotiated support fees to subsidize resident students. Available programs include dental school. WWAMI is the Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana Idaho Cooperative Program that enables Montana students to attend the University of Washington School of Medicine at a reduced tuition rate as the State of Montana pays a negotiated support fee to subsidize resident students.

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<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that despite the annual state support fee, Montana residents who attend the WWAMI dental school are also paying \$27,016 tuition each year and students attending the Minnesota Dental Program are paying \$29,724 per year in tuition (figures for academic year 2005-2006).