



SENATE MAJORITY OFFICE

Oregon State Legislature
State Capitol
Salem, OR

NEWS RELEASE

April 25, 2013

CONTACT: Tom Powers (503) 986-1074
tom.powers@state.or.us

Senate gives rural health care access a shot in the arm

SB 440B substantially increases loan repayment program to bolster Oregon's health care workforce

SALEM—The Oregon Senate voted today to address the shortage of primary care providers by expanding the state's loan repayment program for health care providers. SB 440B, which passed on a unanimous vote with two excused, will help to fill the demand for preventative health care services in Oregon's rural communities.

"We need more providers in places like Prineville. More family physicians in Fossil. More dentists in Drain. There's an unmet need for care that we can address today," said Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward (D-Beaverton), who is a family physician and the chief sponsor of Senate Bill 440B. "SB 440B will help break down barriers to health care access in these underserved areas."

In 2012, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) awarded Oregon \$1.9 billion to assist health care reform efforts that are expected to produce budget savings for federal and state governments. As a condition of participation, CMS is requiring Oregon to expand access to primary care in rural areas or urban areas that have barriers to health care access.

"We need to recruit and retain high-quality primary care providers in Oregon's rural areas to make sure these communities don't get left behind," said Senator Alan Bates (D-Medford), who is a primary care physician. "This program will ensure access to affordable, preventative care for Oregonians in every corner of our state, while giving primary care providers some relief on their medical school loans."

SB 440B allocates a total of \$4 million to the Primary Care Provider Loan Repayment Program. The program will provide assistance to primary care providers who have committed to serving medical assistance recipients in rural or medically underserved areas of the state. Oregon Health Authority will work with the Office of Rural Health to identify rural communities in need and award funds to providers that meet the program's criteria.

"Improving access to affordable health care is a key component of our agenda," said Senate Majority Leader Diane Rosenbaum (D-Portland). "This bill strengthens our health care workforce in rural communities and underserved areas."

SB 440B is one of an early series of bills to head to a floor vote from the Joint Ways and Means Committee, signaling its importance in the session and a consensus around better serving rural Oregon.

The bill will now go to the Oregon House of Representatives for a vote.

###

For more information on the Senate Majority Caucus, please visit www.orsenatemajority.org