

This testimony is written in support of SF 2344, to include public health loan repayment in the North Dakota State healthcare workforce loan repayment program

1. Description of Policy Idea

Funding to the North Dakota Department of Health would establish a loan repayment program to assure an adequate supply of and encourage recruitment and retention of public health professionals to eliminate critical public health workforce shortages in Local, State, and Tribal public health agencies. When asked why positions in local public health are difficult to recruit for and retain, the primary reason given by local public health administrators was low wages and compensation. Training is expensive, and the jobs in local public health are not high paying. The result is that graduates in nursing and public health pursue work in the private sector; rather than local public health. And yet, we need an influx of new, well trained public health professionals.

2. Describe why this policy is needed and/or what problem we are trying to solve.

The current and emerging public health work demands a basket of skills that many local public health professionals acknowledge they lack because of these skills being taught only through a formal public health training such as a Master of Public Health (MPH) curriculum, but only 14% of them have any formal public health training. Below is this information in more detail.

The public health workforce across the county is quite well educated, with 30% of the workforce having a master's degree or higher, but in North Dakota local public health, only 4.3% have a master's degree or higher. Nationwide only 14% of local public health professionals have formal public health training; despite a 300% increase in public health graduates since 1992. A larger proportion of state employees have advanced degrees at 39% with 19% of the state workforce having an actual degree in public health. (The de Beaumont Foundation. *Public Health Workforce Interests and Needs Survey*. 2017. <https://debeaumont.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/PH-WINS-2017.pdf>)

Health departments face a high rate of turnover. In the recent several years, 22 of the 28 local public health administrators in North Dakota will have been or are soon to be, replace due to retirement and resignation. We need a need infusion of equally devoted, and talented public health leaders to take their place. The top two reasons reported for considering leaving public health were dissatisfaction with pay and lack of opportunity for advancement. (The de Beaumont Foundation. *Public Health Workforce Interests and Needs Survey*. 2017. <https://debeaumont.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/PH-WINS-2017.pdf>) These burdens could be lightened through a loan repayment program which supports their salary and incentivizes pursuing of an advanced degree.

The areas where respondents reported needed training are skills included in formal public health training: budgeting and financial management, systems and strategic thinking, change management, and developing a vision for a healthy community. (The de Beaumont Foundation. *Public Health Workforce Interests and Needs Survey*. 2017. <https://debeaumont.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/PH-WINS-2017.pdf>)

Our state now provides MPH and other public health related degree opportunities including nursing and environmental health. Loan repayment would provide the incentive to recruit students into these public health programs; recruit them into North Dakota practice sites and retain them for the required of years of service and beyond as they are invested in the community.

Please support SB 2344 and strengthen public health in North Dakota.

Sincerely,
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