

Senate Health & Human Services

04/11/2022 01:30 PM

SB22-172 Colorado Rural Health-care Workforce Initiative

Typed Text of Testimony Submitted

| Name, Position, Representing | Typed Text of Testimony |
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| Kenneth Maestas For The Colorado Cross Disability Coalition (CCDC) | <p>SB22-172: Colorado Rural Health-care Workforce Initiative</p> <p>CCDC is in favor of SB22-172: Colorado Rural Health-care Workforce Initiative for these reasons:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. It establishes the Colorado rural health-care workforce initiative which will expand the number of health-care professionals practicing in Colorado's rural or frontier counties.2. As part of the initiative, an institution of higher education is authorized to establish and operate a health-care professionals rural track within any health-care professional education program offered by the institution.3. A rural track must set aside seats in its health-care professional education program for students who express an interest in studying and working in a rural or frontier county, offer didactic curriculum related to practicing the health-care discipline in rural or frontier counties, place students in rural or frontier counties for hands-on instruction and training, and award scholarships to students in the rural track.4. To receive a scholarship, a student must commit to working as a health-care professional in a rural or frontier county for 2 years after completing education and training.5. The rural office at the university of Colorado's school of medicine provides technical assistance to the institutions operating a rural track regarding recruiting and admitting students committed to working in rural areas and identifying rural or frontier counties in which students may be placed for clinical training.6. The rural program office also facilitates, arranges, or advises an institution about arranging housing for students placed in a rural or frontier county.7. The rural program office must provide, without charge, to institutions operating a rural track, didactic curriculum related to practicing in rural or frontier counties.8. SB22-172 requires the rural program office to annually evaluate the effectiveness of the initiative and report to the general assembly's education committees about the initiative.9. SB22-172 requires the general assembly to annually appropriate \$150,000 to the rural program office to support institutions that operate a rural track.10 For state fiscal year 2022-23, the general assembly is required to appropriate up to \$400,000 to certain institutions to establish or expand rural tracks in 12 programs specified in SB22-172. <p>Thank you for your time & attention to this very important bill!</p> <p>Kenny Maestas</p> |

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4/8/22

Members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Marisa Wickerath, MD and I am a resident physician at St Joseph's Hospital here in Denver. I am testifying on behalf of the Colorado Academy of Family Physicians, which represents over 2,500 family physicians, residents, and students across our state, in support of SB 22-172, "Colorado Rural Health-care Workforce Initiative." As someone who grew up in a rural area and hopes to practice rural medicine one day, this bill is both personal and professional.

I'm originally from a small farming town in Washington State and loved growing up in a tight-knit community. I always knew I wanted to return to a similar rural area, so when I decided to apply to medical school, I was excited to learn that the University of Washington offers a rural track that pairs medical students with rural towns and preceptors. Throughout this rural track, I spent over six months working alongside rural physicians in the local clinic and critical access hospital. If not for these physicians, our patients would have had to travel over forty miles to the next largest hospital. This program not only allowed me to experience rural medicine first-hand, but also provided an opportunity to serve a population I care deeply about alongside inspiring mentors. My experience in the rural track solidified my resolve to pursue rural medicine and kept me grounded in this commitment despite the long road of medical training.

Unfortunately, the shortage of doctors in rural Washington and Colorado is not unique. According to the 2014 National Center for Health Workforce Analysis report, less than 8% of all physicians and surgeons choose to practice in rural areas. The same report found that rural areas have half as many physicians and surgeons per 10,000 patients as urban areas. There are many reasons why our rural areas are facing a shortage of providers, but I strongly believe that rural health tracks can help combat this issue by creating a pipeline for applicants who are already interested and/or deeply committed to rural areas. However, we not only need more rural physicians, we need more nurses, pharmacists, mental health professionals, dentists, physical therapists, and advanced practitioners. Without these critical team members, rural physicians will not be able to serve their communities as effectively.

SB 22-172 will directly work to address this shortage by providing incentive and support for healthcare students interested in serving rural areas. For the health of our most vulnerable populations, I ask you to vote in support of this bill and thank you for allowing me to share my story.

Sincerely,

Marisa Wickerath, MD
Denver



UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

School of Nursing

Written Testimony Provided to the
Colorado Senate Health and Human Services Committee
Senate Bill 22-172
Colorado Rural Healthcare Workforce Initiative
April 11, 2022

Melissa Henry, PhD, FNP-C, RN
Director and Professor
School of Nursing at the University of Northern Colorado

Dear Madam Chair Fields and members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Dr. Melissa Henry and I currently serve as the director for the School of Nursing at the University of Northern Colorado, having been a registered nurse since 1998 and family nurse practitioner since 2002. The UNC School of Nursing was founded in 1962 and has a rich history of excellence in educating students to become professional nurses and nurse practitioners who serve our local and regional communities with their healthcare needs.

I am writing today to urge you to vote in support of Senate Bill 22-172, Colorado Rural Health-care Workforce Initiative. This bill would provide an essential investment in our programs to aid in our ability to meet the nursing workforce needs of our rural communities.

The UNC School of Nursing is dedicated to assisting our rural communities with the nursing workforce challenges they face. For the past several years we have been exploring opportunities to expand our nursing programs to rural and frontier counties near Greeley, CO, but have had difficulty due to a deficiency of student, administrative, and faculty resources. There is significant interest in our nursing programs by prospective students from rural and frontier counties, many of whom are first generation students who may not have the resources to enter our program. Additionally, we lack administrative and faculty resources to expand our programs to the rural settings, which requires additional support for the costs of housing, travel, and other needs of students who dedicate their education to these locations.

Passage of Senate Bill 22 – 172 will assist in addressing the nursing workforce shortage in rural and frontier Colorado, by providing institutions of higher education, such as the UNC School of Nursing, with much needed resources and opportunities for collaboration to expand our programs to the rural areas throughout Colorado.

We greatly appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on this essential bill to support nursing education and workforce development.

Sincerely,

Melissa LM Henry, PhD, FNP-C, RN