

Date of Hearing: April 26, 2022

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Jose Medina, Chair

AB 2666 (Salas) – As Introduced February 18, 2022

**SUBJECT:** Behavioral health internship grant program.

**SUMMARY:** Establishes a new grant program within the Department of Healthcare Access and Information (DHCAI) to provide stipends to students in behavioral health fields who are participating in unpaid internships or completing licensure hours, through unpaid positions, at a federally qualified health center (FQHC). Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Establishes the Behavioral Health Internship Grant Program to be administered by DHCAI to provide stipends to students in behavioral health fields who are completing licensure hours through unpaid positions or participating in unpaid internships at FQHCs.
- 2) Directs DHCAI to consider mental health professional shortage areas and underrepresented groups in the behavioral health workforce.
- 3) Requires DHCAI to collect and annually report data about the impact of the program on the availability and demographics of the behavioral health workforce.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Establishes the California Student Aid Commission (CSAC) for the purpose of administering specified student financial aid programs (Education Code Section 69510, et seq.).
- 2) Establishes DHCAI, (formerly the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development) to, among other functions, collect, analyze, and publish data about healthcare workforce and health professional training, identify areas of health workforce shortages, and provide scholarships, loan repayments, and grants to students, graduates, and institutions providing direct patient care in areas of unmet need. Authorizes DHCAI to award competitive grants to entities and individuals it deems qualified to expand the supply of behavioral health counselors, coaches, peer supports, and other allied health care providers serving children and youth (Health and Safety Code Section 127000 and Section 127825, et seq.).
- 3) Requires DHCAI, in coordination with the California Behavioral Health Planning Council, to identify the total statewide needs for each professional and other occupational category utilizing county needs assessment information and to develop a five-year education and training development plan. Such plans should include loan forgiveness, scholarships, and stipends for mental health professionals and plans to expand postsecondary education to address identified mental health shortages (Welfare and Institutions Code Section 5820 and Section 5822).

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown

**COMMENTS:** *Double referral.* This bill passed out of the Assembly Committee on Health with a vote of 14 – 0 on April 5, 2022. The Health Committee heard the measure as it pertains to matters that are germane to the Health Committee’s jurisdiction.

*Background.* According to the California Future Health Workforce Commission, just one third of Californians who live with a mental health illness receive the care they need due to a shortage of behavioral healthcare workers. The consequences of this shortage will intensify during the coming years as professionals retire. Pre-pandemic, as of 2017, only two of California's 56 county mental health plans met access requirements. Additionally, within the next decade, the state is expected to see the number of psychiatrists decline by 34%.

Further, in addition to the shortage of mental health care providers, a shortage of diversity in the healthcare workforce in California exists. For example, while Latinx represent 38% of the State's population, Latinx represent approximately 7% of physicians and 9% of primary care physicians in the State. Additionally, the Spanish language is the most underrepresented language in health care with 62 Spanish-speaking physicians for every 100,000 people who only speak Spanish. According to the author, "The cost of receiving a health profession education is also on the rise, and these prohibitive costs act as a barrier to entry for those interested in the profession, especially those that come from lower-income backgrounds."

*Purpose of the measure.* According to the author, "The state has a history of creating grant programs to promote diversity in the workforce and support those from lower-income backgrounds who do not have as many resources to finish their credentials or are discouraged from even attempting to join the medical field because of the costs associated."

Further, the author states, "The bill will help pay for stipends to students in behavioral health fields of study who are participating in internships or completing their licensure hours. When determining how best to give out the stipends, the department must consider shortage areas and target underrepresented groups in the behavioral workforce. This will help increase the number of behavioral health professionals in California while also making the workforce more reflective of the populations within California. Unpaid internships and licensure hours are discouraging to prospective professionals from lower income backgrounds, who do not have the same resources as their peers and are more often non-white and speak more than one language."

The author states, "We must do more to expand our critically important behavioral healthcare workforce. Staffing shortages are leaving our most vulnerable Californians without help or treatment, impacting the lives of thousands of families."

Lastly, the author contends that, "AB 2666 will improve mental health treatment access in California and help those professionals that are struggling to finish their credentials and begin the work of healing our communities."

*Budgetary actions.* The Governor's 2022 Budget Proposal includes a one-time \$1.7 billion investment to span three years for economy workforce development across both the Labor and Workforce Development Agency (LWDA) and the California Health and Human Services Agency (CHHSA) with the goal of the creation of more innovative and accessible opportunities to recruit, train, hire, and advance an ethnically and culturally inclusive health and human services workforce, with improved diversity, wages, and health equity outcomes. These economy investments will be jointly coordinated by the LWDA and CHHSA through the CHHSA and the DHCAI Health Workforce Education and Training Council.

*Appropriate entity to administer the grant program?* The CSAC serves as the principal state agency responsible for administering financial aid programs for students attending public and

independent universities, colleges, and vocational schools in California. The mission of CSAC is to promote educational equity by making postsecondary education affordable for all Californians.

Additionally, CSAC serves as a resource for policymakers and the public on college affordability and financing issues, and advocates for policy changes to eliminate cost as a barrier to any qualified California student pursuing a higher education. CSAC's vision is to transform lives by creating educational opportunities for the state's diverse population, driving its social and economic well-being to ensure a promising future for all.

California is home to the largest postsecondary system in the nation; serving millions of students a year; many whom rely on the services of CSAC in order to receive various forms of state financial aid. Yet, as of 2021-22, CSAC only has 137.5 authorized ongoing staff positions, as well as 2.2 temporary positions. These positions span seven divisions, the largest of which are program administration and services, information technology (IT), fiscal and administrative services, and the executive division. As of January 2022, CSAC reported that 16% (or 22.5 positions) were vacant, with the IT division accounting for 40% of the vacancies. Committee Staff understands that the majority of CSAC's vacant positions have been unfilled for less than three months and CSAC is actively recruiting to fill the vacant positions.

*Despite the staff vacancies at CSAC, based on the nature of this created grant program, moving forward, the author may wish to work with the CSAC in determining if CSAC is the more appropriate and better-suited entity to administer the grant program.*

*Committee comments.* As noted below, a few pieces of legislation are moving through the Legislative Process this Session that, in part, have similar goals and objectives to this measure.

*This Committee may wish to discuss if it is prudent to have one measure move forward that consolidates the goals of the various measures. Additionally, the Committee may wish to discuss if a budget action is prudent to ensure a specific appropriation is available in order to implement this or other similar measures.*

*Further, as currently drafted, this measure is silent in a number of areas, including, but not limited to, the following:*

- 1) Determination of eligibility for students to receive grant;*
- 2) Eligibly criteria of students (are they undergraduate or graduate students, or both);*
- 3) How eligible students will be notified of this new grant program;*
- 4) How eligible students apply;*
- 5) Will this grant supplement or supplant undergraduate recipients who also draw down on the federal Pell Grant and/or Cal Grant, or both; and,*
- 6) If students receive this grant, will it jeopardize their institutional aid award or other forms of financial assistance?*

7) *What is the monetary value of the grant?*

*Moving forward, the author may wish to work with this Committee and CSAC in creating specificity to this measure and ensuring no unintended consequences exist for students already receiving various forms of financial aid.*

*Related legislation.* AB 2522 (Gray) of 2022, which will be heard by this Committee today, in part, requires the DHCAI to develop and administer the Public Health Workforce Loan Repayment Program to provide loan assistance payments to qualifying public health workforce staff.

SB 964 (Wiener), which is pending a hearing in the Senate Committee on Education, in part, establishes the Behavioral Health Workforce Preservation and Restoration Fund to stabilize the current licensed clinical behavioral health workforce; establishes a stipend program for students pursuing a master's degree in social work with a specialized focus on public behavioral health; and, requires DHCAI to create an online jobs board for behavioral health workers.

SB 1229 (McGuire), which is pending a hearing in the Senate Committee on Education, in part, establishes the Mental Health Workforce Grant Program and requires CSAC to administer the Program.

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

**Support**

California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists  
California Consortium of Addiction Programs and Professionals  
California State Association of Psychiatrists

**Opposition**

None on file.

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