



Ninety-Ninth Legislature - Second Session - 2006
Introducer's Statement of Intent
LB 1220

Chairperson: Jim Jensen
Committee: Health and Human Services
Date of Hearing: February 9, 2006

The following constitutes the reasons for this bill and the purposes which are sought to be accomplished thereby:

LB 1220 establishes the Rural Behavioral Health Training and Placement Program Act to address behavioral health professional shortages in Nebraska's rural areas.

Currently, 88 of Nebraska's 93 counties are classified as mental and behavioral health shortages by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, and by the Federal Health Resources and Services Administration. Seventy-four percent of the state's mental and behavioral health professionals are concentrated in metropolitan areas, leaving the remaining one-quarter of licensed professionals to cover 72,000 square miles of rural Nebraska. Thirty-eight of the counties in the State have one (N=23) or no (N=15) licensed behavioral health professionals.

To address these problems, The Monroe Meyer Institute (MMI) at the University of Nebraska Medical Center has developed a model that incorporates behavioral health into the Primary Health Care (Pediatric and Family Medicine) delivery system by integrating behavioral health specialists into practice with physicians. For the last six years, federal funding has been provided to MMI that place mental and behavioral health professionals (psychologists, social workers, marriage and family therapists, psychiatric nurse practitioners, and counselors), interns, fellows and graduate students in underserved areas of the state. During the past four years this program has provided over 5,500 annual patient visits to families in over 140 Nebraska cities and towns. Upon completion of their schooling, more than half of these interns, fellows and graduate trainees are staying and practicing in those rural areas.

Despite the success of the program, federal budget cuts means additional funding sources are needed to sustain these programs. Without financial support, over 3,500 rural patient visits will be unavailable annually.

To continue this program, LB 1220 proposes an appropriation of \$200,000, per year, to support: a) increased outreach faculty positions and their clinical and training activities, b) internship stipends for behavioral health interns and post-doctoral fellows, and c) training and service provision expenses to include travel to rural clinic sites, equipment, clinic space, patient record management, scheduling, telehealth supervision, etc.

Principal Introducer: _____
Senator Dennis Byars