A BILL FOR AN ACT

CONCERNING AN INITIATIVE TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF HEALTH-CARE PROFESSIONALS PRACTICING IN COLORADO'S RURAL AREAS.

Bill Summary

(Note: This summary applies to this bill as introduced and does not reflect any amendments that may be subsequently adopted. If this bill passes third reading in the house of introduction, a bill summary that applies to the reengrossed version of this bill will be available at http://leg.colorado.gov.)

The bill establishes the Colorado rural health-care workforce initiative (initiative) to expand the number of health-care professionals practicing in Colorado's rural or frontier counties. As part of the initiative, an institution of higher education (institution) is authorized to establish and operate a health-care professionals rural track within any health-care
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. In order 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.

The rural office at the university of Colorado's school of medicine (rural program office) 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. The rural program office also facilitates, arranges, or advises an institution about arranging housing for students placed in a rural or frontier county. The rural program office must provide, without charge, to institutions operating a rural track, didactic curriculum related to practicing in rural or frontier counties. The bill 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.

The bill requires the general assembly to annually appropriate $150,000 to the rural program office to support institutions that operate a rural track. 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 the bill.

1 Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of Colorado:

2 SECTION 1. Legislative declaration. (1) The general assembly finds and declares that:

3   (a) Nearly three-quarters of Colorado's sixty-four counties are designated as rural or frontier counties by the state office of rural health;

4   (b) Rural and frontier counties have difficulty recruiting and retaining health-care workers;

5   (c) The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic that decimated the health-care workforce across Colorado hit rural areas especially hard, and the associated burnout is causing health-care workers to leave medicine
(d) The university of Colorado (CU) school of medicine's rural office at the Anschutz medical campus provides a model program for educating health-care professionals that wish to live and work in rural areas. Other institutions that educate health-care professionals can take advantage of the expertise, experience, and infrastructure in place at the CU school of medicine's rural office in order to prepare their health-care students to work in rural or frontier counties.

(e) Establishing and funding a limited number of health-care professional rural track programs allows the general assembly to collect data and information on best practices for providing rural-practice-focused education to health-care professionals; and

(f) The general assembly can use the lessons learned to later expand the new Colorado rural health-care workforce initiative to other institutions and practice areas to increase the number of health-care professionals practicing in Colorado's rural and frontier counties.

SECTION 2. In Colorado Revised Statutes, add article 76.5 to title 23 as follows:

ARTICLE 76.5

Colorado Rural Health-care Workforce Initiative

23-76.5-101. Definitions. As used in this article 76.5, unless the context otherwise requires:

(1) "Health-care professional" means a physician, physician assistant, physical therapist, nurse, including nurse practitioner, pharmacist, dentist, professional counselor, psychologist, social worker, or marriage and family therapist who is registered, certified, or licensed pursuant to title 12 and
WHO IS SUBJECT TO CREDENTIALING. "HEALTH-CARE PROFESSIONAL" ALSO INCLUDES A PUBLIC HEALTH PROFESSIONAL WHO IS NOT REQUIRED TO BE REGISTERED, CERTIFIED, OR LICENSED PURSUANT TO STATE LAW.

(2) "HEALTH-CARE PROFESSIONALS RURAL TRACK" OR "RURAL TRACK" MEANS A HEALTH-CARE PROFESSIONALS RURAL TRACK ESTABLISHED BY AN INSTITUTION PURSUANT TO SECTION 23-76.5-102.

(3) "INITIATIVE" MEANS THE COLORADO RURAL HEALTH-CARE WORKFORCE INITIATIVE ESTABLISHED IN THIS ARTICLE 76.5.

(4) "INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION" OR "INSTITUTION" MEANS STATE INSTITUTIONS AS DEFINED IN SECTION 23-18-102 (10)(a), LOCAL DISTRICT COLLEGES, AND AREA TECHNICAL COLLEGES.

(5) "PRECEPTOR" MEANS A HEALTH-CARE PROFESSIONAL WHO IS REGISTERED, CERTIFIED, OR LICENSED, AS APPROPRIATE, PURSUANT TO TITLE 12 WHO ASSUMES THE RESPONSIBILITY OF TEACHING, SUPERVISING, AND EVALUATING A Student SEEKING A DEGREE IN A HEALTH-CARE PROFESSION DISCIPLINE AS PART OF THE STUDENT'S CLINICAL TRAINING AND EDUCATION IN A RURAL OR FRONTIER COUNTY.

(6) "RURAL OR FRONTIER COUNTY" MEANS A COUNTY IN COLORADO DESIGNATED BY THE STATE OFFICE OF RURAL HEALTH, KNOWN AS THE COLORADO RURAL HEALTH CENTER, AS A RURAL OR FRONTIER COUNTY.

(7) "RURAL PROGRAM OFFICE" MEANS THE OFFICE THAT ADMINISTERS THE UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO'S SCHOOL OF MEDICINE'S RURAL PROGRAM AT THE HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER CAMPUS.

23-76.5-102. Colorado rural health-care workforce initiative - institution health-care professionals rural tracks. (1) THERE IS ESTABLISHED THE COLORADO RURAL HEALTH-CARE WORKFORCE
INITIATIVE TO 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 MAY ESTABLISH A HEALTH-CARE PROFESSIONALS RURAL
TRACK, OR EXPAND AN EXISTING RURAL TRACK, THAT MEETS THE CRITERIA
DESCRIBED IN SUBSECTION (3) OF THIS SECTION, WITHIN ANY SPECIFIED
HEALTH-CARE PROFESSIONAL CREDENTIAL OR DEGREE PROGRAM OFFERED
AT THE INSTITUTION. ON OR BEFORE AUGUST 1 OF EACH FISCAL YEAR IN
WHICH AN INSTITUTION RECEIVES FUNDING FOR A RURAL TRACK, THE
INSTITUTION SHALL SUBMIT TO THE RURAL PROGRAM OFFICE A WRITTEN
PLAN DESCRIBING HOW THE INSTITUTION INTENDS TO USE THE FUNDING TO
MEET THE REQUIREMENTS FOR A RURAL TRACK DESCRIBED IN SUBSECTION
(3) OF THIS SECTION.

(3) SUBJECT TO AVAILABLE APPROPRIATIONS, IN OPERATING A
RURAL TRACK, AN INSTITUTION SHALL:

(a) CONDUCT AN OUTREACH CAMPAIGN TO PROMOTE KNOWLEDGE
OF AND INTEREST IN RURAL HEALTH-CARE CAREERS, INFORM STUDENTS
AND PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS OF THE INITIATIVE, AND IDENTIFY POTENTIAL
STUDENT APPLICANTS;

(b) PRIORITIZE ADMISSION TO THE INSTITUTION AND SET ASIDE
SEATS IN ITS HEALTH-CARE PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR
STUDENTS IN THE RURAL TRACK;

(c) AWARD SCHOLARSHIPS TO STUDENTS IN THE RURAL TRACK, AS
DESCRIBED IN SUBSECTION (6) OF THIS SECTION;

(d) OFFER DIDACTIC CURRICULUM THAT THE RURAL PROGRAM
OFFICE DEVELOPS IN COLLABORATION WITH OTHER INSTITUTIONS THAT
OPERATE A RURAL TRACK RELATED TO PRACTICING THE HEALTH-CARE
DISCIPLINE IN RURAL OR FRONTIER COUNTIES TO STUDENTS IN THE RURAL TRACK;

(e) IDENTIFY RURAL OR FRONTIER COUNTIES IN WHICH STUDENTS MAY ACCOMPLISH THEIR CLINICAL TRAINING AND ESTABLISH RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN STUDENTS AND HEALTH-CARE PROFESSIONALS IN RURAL OR FRONTIER COUNTIES WHO CAN SERVE AS PRECEPTORS;

(f) PROVIDE INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT AND ADMINISTRATIVE RESOURCES FOR PRECEPTORS; AND

(g) PLACE STUDENTS FOR A SIGNIFICANT DURATION IN RURAL OR FRONTIER COUNTIES FOR CLINICAL INSTRUCTION AND TRAINING OF SIGNIFICANT DEPTH FROM A PRECEPTOR, WHICH PLACEMENT MAY BE IN COLLABORATION WITH THE RURAL PROGRAM OFFICE AND OTHER PARTICIPATING PROGRAMS IN THE INITIATIVE.

(4) AN INSTITUTION THAT RECEIVES FUNDING FOR A RURAL TRACK SHALL REPORT TO THE RURAL PROGRAM OFFICE INFORMATION ABOUT THE RURAL TRACK REQUESTED BY THE RURAL PROGRAM OFFICE FOR THE PURPOSE OF PREPARING THE REPORT DESCRIBED IN SECTION 23-76.5-104.

(5) AN INSTITUTION MAY USE THE MONEY APPROPRIATED FOR ITS RURAL TRACK PURSUANT TO SECTION 23-76.5-105 FOR THE FOLLOWING:

(a) TOTAL OR PARTIAL COMPENSATION FOR ONE OR MORE FACULTY OR STAFF TO DEVELOP THE RURAL TRACK AND TO OPERATE THE RURAL TRACK IN A MANNER THAT MEETS THE REQUIREMENTS LISTED IN SUBSECTION (3) OF THIS SECTION;

(b) THE COST OF HOUSING FOR STUDENTS FOR ALL OR PART OF THE DURATION OF THE STUDENTS' CLINICAL INSTRUCTION AND TRAINING IN A RURAL OR FRONTIER COUNTY;

(c) TRAINING PRECEPTORS WHO PRACTICE IN RURAL OR FRONTIER
COUNTIES TO PROVIDE PERSONALIZED CLINICAL INSTRUCTION OR TRAINING
TO RURAL TRACK STUDENTS; AND

(d) PROVIDING SCHOLARSHIPS TO STUDENTS IN THE RURAL TRACK,
AS DESCRIBED IN SUBSECTION (6) OF THIS SECTION.

(6) (a) AN INSTITUTION THAT OPERATES A RURAL TRACK SHALL
AWARD SCHOLARSHIPS TO STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN THE RURAL TRACK
WHO COMMIT IN WRITING TO LIVING AND WORKING AS A HEALTH-CARE
PROFESSIONAL IN A RURAL OR FRONTIER COUNTY FOR TWO YEARS AFTER
COMPLETING EDUCATION AND TRAINING. AN INSTITUTION SHALL USE
FORTY PERCENT OF THE FUNDING RECEIVED FOR THE RURAL TRACK TO
AWARD SCHOLARSHIPS. THE INSTITUTION MAY DETERMINE THE AMOUNT
OF EACH SCHOLARSHIP BASED ON THE SCHOLARSHIP APPLICANT'S
DEMONSTRATED FINANCIAL NEED AND DEMONSTRATED COMMITMENT TO
WORKING AS A HEALTH-CARE PROFESSIONAL IN A RURAL OR FRONTIER
COUNTY.

(b) A STUDENT WHO FAILS TO FULFILL THE COMMITMENT TO WORK
IN A RURAL OR FRONTIER COUNTY AFTER ACCEPTING A SCHOLARSHIP
SHALL REMIT THE FULL AMOUNT OF THE SCHOLARSHIP TO THE INSTITUTION
THAT AWARDED THE SCHOLARSHIP. EACH INSTITUTION THAT OPERATES A
RURAL TRACK IS RESPONSIBLE FOR DEVELOPING A PROCESS FOR
DETERMINING WHETHER A STUDENT FULFILLS THE COMMITMENT AND FOR
RECOVERING SCHOLARSHIP MONEY WHEN NECESSARY. AN INSTITUTION
THAT RECOVERS SCHOLARSHIP MONEY PURSUANT TO THIS SUBSECTION
(6)(b) SHALL USE THE MONEY FOR ANY PERMISSIBLE USE DESCRIBED IN
SUBSECTION (3) OF THIS SECTION.

(c) RECEIVING A SCHOLARSHIP DESCRIBED IN THIS SUBSECTION (6)
DOES NOT AFFECT THE STUDENTS' ELIGIBILITY FOR THE COLORADO
HEALTH SERVICE CORPS DESCRIBED IN PART 5 OF ARTICLE 1.5 OF TITLE 25.

23-76.5-103. Initiative administrative and education support - university of Colorado school of medicine rural program. (1) The rural program office shall provide assistance to the institutions establishing and operating a rural track. The rural program office shall:

(a) Provide guidance to an institution regarding recruiting and admitting students committed to working in rural areas;

(b) Assist an institution with identifying rural or frontier counties in which students may accomplish their clinical training and establishing relationships between students and health-care professionals in rural or frontier counties who can serve as preceptors;

(c) Facilitate, arrange, or advise an institution about arranging housing for students receiving clinical instruction and training in a rural or frontier county;

(d) Develop, in collaboration with institutions that operate a rural track, didactic curriculum related to practicing in rural or frontier counties and provide the curriculum without charge to each institution that operates a rural track; and

(e) Provide any other technical or administrative assistance that may benefit an institution that is establishing or operating a rural track.

(2) (a) The rural program office shall develop metrics to evaluate the effectiveness of the initiative and rural tracks,
ANNUALLY EVALUATE THE INITIATIVE AND RURAL TRACKS, AND CREATE THE REPORT DESCRIBED IN SECTION 23-76.5-104.

(b) The rural program office may collaborate with the regional area health education centers and the Colorado rural health center to assess rural community health-care priority needs in order to inform decisions about rural track funding, and may include any relevant findings and information in the report.

23-76.5-104. Initiative reporting. (1) On or before November 1, 2023, and on or before November 1 each year thereafter, the rural program office shall submit a report to the House of Representatives Education Committee and the Senate Education Committee, or their successor committees, concerning the initiative. The report must include:

(a) Information about each institution’s health-care professionals rural tracks, the number of students enrolled in each rural track, the number of students who have completed each rural track and are practicing in a rural or frontier county; and any other relevant data and information about the initiative; and

(b) The rural program office’s analysis of the effectiveness of the initiative and rural tracks.

(2) The report may include recommendations for legislative changes to the initiative, including recommendations for expanding the initiative.

23-76.5-105. Initiative funding - repeal. (1) The general assembly shall annually appropriate to the university of
COLORADO HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER CAMPUS ONE HUNDRED FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLARS FOR THE RURAL PROGRAM OFFICE TO CARRY OUT ITS DUTIES DESCRIBED IN SECTION 23-76.5-103. THE APPROPRIATION DESCRIBED IN THIS SUBSECTION (1) IS SEPARATE FROM ANY APPROPRIATION TO THE UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO, OR ANY CAMPUS OR PROGRAM THEREOF, FOR A RURAL TRACK, AS DESCRIBED IN SUBSECTION (2) OF THIS SECTION.

(2) (a) FOR THE 2022-23 STATE FISCAL YEAR, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY SHALL APPROPRIATE TO EACH OF THE FOLLOWING INSTITUTIONS A MAXIMUM OF FOUR HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS FOR EACH PROGRAM OR SCHOOL LISTED IN THIS SUBSECTION (2) TO ESTABLISH OR EXPAND AN EXISTING RURAL TRACK PURSUANT TO THIS ARTICLE 76.5:

(I) ADAMS STATE UNIVERSITY, IN ITS NURSING PROGRAM;
(II) COLORADO MESA UNIVERSITY, IN ITS NURSING PROGRAM;
(III) THE COLORADO SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH, IN ITS MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH PROGRAM;
(IV) COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY - PUEBLO, IN ITS SCHOOL OF NURSING;
(V) METROPOLITAN STATE UNIVERSITY OF DENVER, IN ITS NURSING PROGRAM;
(VI) THE UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO, IN THE FOLLOWING PROGRAMS OR SCHOOLS:
(A) AT THE HEALTH SCIENCES CENTER CAMPUS, IN ITS SCHOOL OF DENTAL MEDICINE AND SCHOOL OF MEDICINE; AND
(B) AT THE COLORADO SPRINGS CAMPUS, IN ITS NURSING PROGRAM;
(VII) THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO, IN ITS SCHOOL
OF NURSING;

(VIII) WESTERN COLORADO UNIVERSITY, IN ITS MASTER OF
BEHAVIORAL SCIENCE IN RURAL COMMUNITY HEALTH PROGRAM; AND

(IX) AT THE FOLLOWING INSTITUTIONS GOVERNED BY THE STATE
BOARD FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGES AND OCCUPATIONAL EDUCATION:

(A) FRONT RANGE COMMUNITY COLLEGE, IN ITS NURSING
PROGRAM; AND

(B) OTERO COLLEGE, IN ITS NURSING PROGRAM.

(b) FOR FISCAL YEAR 2022-23, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY SHALL
NOT APPROPRIATE MONEY TO AN INSTITUTION TO ESTABLISH OR OPERATE
A RURAL TRACK OTHER THAN AS DESCRIBED IN THIS SUBSECTION (2).

(c) THIS SUBSECTION (2) IS REPEALED, EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 2023.

SECTION 3. Safety clause. The general assembly hereby finds,
determines, and declares that this act is necessary for the immediate
preservation of the public peace, health, or safety.