

1 AN ACT relating to dentistry, making an appropriation therefor, and declaring an
2 emergency.

3 ***Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky:***

4 ➔Section 1. KRS 164.936 is amended to read as follows:

5 (1) The General Assembly hereby establishes the statewide Healthcare Worker Loan
6 Relief Program designed to be in alignment with the federally funded state loan
7 repayment program authorized under KRS 211.165, ***except as provided in***
8 ***subsection (3) of this section,*** in providing student loan repayment for eligible
9 healthcare workers within the Commonwealth. The Healthcare Worker Loan Relief
10 Program shall be administered by the University of Kentucky through the Center of
11 Excellence in Rural Health, and all costs associated with the program, including the
12 reimbursement of any expenses incurred by the center in its administration of the
13 program, shall be funded by state appropriations and other funds held in the
14 healthcare worker loan relief fund, which shall be excluded from the comprehensive
15 funding model established in KRS 164.092.

16 (2) The board of trustees of the University of Kentucky, on behalf of the Center of
17 Excellence in Rural Health, shall adopt policies for the administration of the
18 program that are in alignment with the policies implemented in the administration
19 of KRS 211.165 and the federally funded state loan repayment program it
20 authorizes, ***except as provided in subsection (3) of this section,*** and shall include:

21 (a) The professional, certification, education, employment, and worksite
22 eligibility requirements, except that the professional requirements shall also
23 grant eligibility to ophthalmologists, optometrists, and audiologists;

24 (b) Student loan eligibility requirements;

25 (c) A process to consider applications from eligible healthcare workers, except
26 the policy shall include an application cycle that is open at least biannually;

27 (d) Program admission guidelines;

- 1 (e) The conditions under which admitted healthcare workers shall receive awards;
- 2 (f) To the extent that funding is available, the process for determining award
- 3 amounts, which shall include the tiering of award amounts based on provider
- 4 type, student loan amounts, and other factors, except that the policy shall not
- 5 require a dollar-for-dollar match component from admitted healthcare
- 6 workers' employers; and
- 7 (g) Procedures to provide repayment to loan servicers.

8 (3) Until July 1, 2036, unless extended by an act of the General Assembly:

9 (a) A dentist, as defined in KRS 313.010, who is admitted to the Healthcare

10 Worker Loan Relief Program shall be eligible for up to five (5) consecutive

11 years of service and a total maximum loan repayment award of one

12 hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000). A dentist who practices dentistry

13 in a Kentucky county that does not have an actively practicing dentist on the

14 effective date of the service agreement shall be eligible for an additional one

15 hundred thousand dollars (\$100,000) in loan repayment; and

16 (b) A dentist owning a practice in a federally designated health professional

17 shortage area shall be eligible for a rural dental practice grant under the

18 Healthcare Worker Loan Relief Program for an award of up to one

19 hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000). Funds provided in this

20 paragraph shall be used for any of the following purposes:

- 21 1. Dental equipment and instruments;
- 22 2. Office renovation or construction;
- 23 3. Installation of electronic health record systems; or
- 24 4. Staffing and hiring costs.

25 (4) Funds appropriated to the Center of Excellence in Rural Health for the purpose

26 of subsection (3) of this section shall be distributed as follows:

27 (a) Seventy-five percent (75%) shall be utilized for student loan repayment for

1 *dentists under subsection (3)(a) of this section; and*
 2 *(b) Twenty-five percent (25%) shall be utilized for rural dental practice grants*
 3 *under subsection (3)(b) of this section.*

- 4 **(5)** (a) The healthcare worker loan relief fund is hereby created as a trust fund in the
 5 State Treasury to be administered by the University of Kentucky on behalf of
 6 the Center of Excellence in Rural Health for the purpose of providing loan
 7 repayment *and rural dental practice grants* as described in this section.
- 8 (b) The trust fund shall consist of state general fund appropriations, gifts and
 9 grants from public and private sources, and federal funds. All moneys
 10 included in the fund shall be appropriated for the purposes set forth in this
 11 section.
- 12 (c) Any unallotted or unencumbered balances in the trust fund shall be invested
 13 as provided in KRS 42.500(9). Income earned from the investments shall be
 14 credited to the trust fund.
- 15 (d) Notwithstanding KRS 45.229, any fund balance at the close of the fiscal year
 16 shall not lapse but shall be carried forward to the next fiscal year and
 17 continuously appropriated only for the purposes specified in this section.

18 ➔Section 2. KRS 164.937 is amended to read as follows:

- 19 (1) The University of Kentucky shall maintain a Center of Excellence in Rural Health.
- 20 (2) The mission of the Center of Excellence in Rural Health shall be the improvement
 21 of the health of all rural Kentuckians and the improvement of rural health care
 22 systems through education, research, and service.
- 23 (3) The Center of Excellence in Rural Health shall:
- 24 (a) Support a site-based director, core faculty, and staff;
- 25 (b) Collect and maintain statistical and other information relating to rural health
 26 status, rural health care systems, rural health policy, and other issues affecting
 27 the health and well-being of rural populations;

- 1 (c) Collect, analyze, interpret, disseminate, and make recommendations regarding
2 the availability, distribution, and sufficiency of the health professions
3 workforce;
- 4 (d) Provide educational opportunities for students committed to rural health care:
5 1. To obtain education in needed health professions as determined by the
6 workforce analyses, rotating these programs as necessary;
7 2. By testing and developing innovative models for learning; and
8 3. By reserving funds budgeted for specific educational programs that in
9 the future are deemed no longer necessary for use for educational
10 programs for other health professions;
- 11 (e) Maintain site-based family practice residencies;
- 12 (f) Serve as the federally designated Office of Rural Health and perform the
13 duties prescribed by the United States Health Resources and Services
14 Administration;
- 15 (g) Administer the Healthcare Worker Loan Relief Program established under
16 KRS 164.936;
- 17 (h) Demonstrate or provide innovative programs that improve the health of rural
18 Kentuckians and strengthen rural health care systems; and
- 19 (i) Advocate for rural health care.
- 20 (4) To the extent additional funds are appropriated, the Center of Excellence in Rural
21 Health shall establish additional sites throughout the Commonwealth as necessary
22 to achieve the mission of the center.
- 23 (5) Nothing in this section shall be construed to restrict the study of rural health
24 policies, workforce analyses, or the training of health professionals in or for rural or
25 medically underserved areas by other state universities.
- 26 (6) (a) The University of Kentucky shall report to the Council on Postsecondary
27 Education and the Legislative Research Commission a detailed, audited

1 statement of expenditures for each program function in the Center of
 2 Excellence for Rural Health Care by September 1 of each year which
 3 enumerates expenditures for the preceding fiscal year.

4 **(b) Until July 1, 2036, unless extended by an act of the General Assembly, the**
 5 **report under this subsection shall include, at a minimum, the following**
 6 **additional information on the Healthcare Worker Loan Relief Program:**

7 **1. The number of participating dentists and dentistry practices;**

8 **2. The geographic distribution of participating dentists and dentistry**
 9 **practices, including identification of participating dentists and**
 10 **dentistry practices located in federally designated health professional**
 11 **shortage areas;**

12 **3. Retention rates of participating dentists and dentistry practices;**

13 **4. State patient access metrics; and**

14 **5. Program expenditures.**

15 ➔Section 3. KRS 313.035 is amended to read as follows:

16 (1) The board shall promulgate administrative regulations in accordance with KRS
 17 Chapter 13A relating to dentists. The administrative regulations shall include the
 18 classification of and licensure of dentists, by examination or credentials, the
 19 licensure of specialists, student limited licenses, faculty limited licenses,
 20 reciprocity, retirement of a license, reinstatement of a license, charity licenses,†
 21 ~~and~~ conscious sedation and anesthesia permits, **and the Rural Dental Fellows**
 22 **Network.**

23 (2) Renewal programs shall be organized to include continuing education approved by
 24 the board.

25 (3) For the purposes of licensure of specialists the board shall only recognize fields of
 26 specialty duly recognized and approved by the American Dental Association.
 27 Individuals licensed as specialists shall not practice outside of that specialty except

1 as provided for in charitable dentistry as defined by administrative regulation,
2 during a declared disaster by order of the Governor, or when the special needs of
3 the patient require they be followed past the age of eighteen (18) by a pediatric
4 dentist.

5 (4) No person licensed under this chapter, who in good faith renders emergency care at
6 the scene of an emergency, shall be liable for any civil damages as a result of any
7 acts or omissions by such person in rendering the emergency care.

8 (5) Any dentist who serves on any committee, board, commission, or other entity
9 which is duly constituted by any licensed hospital, dental society or association
10 affiliated with the American Dental Association, dental care foundation affiliated
11 with such dental society or association or governmental or quasi-governmental
12 agency for the purpose of reviewing and evaluating the dental acts of other dentists,
13 or dental auxiliary personnel, shall not be required to respond in damages for any
14 action taken by him or her in good faith as a member of such committee, board,
15 commission, or other entity.

16 (6) Licensed dentists may prescribe any drug necessary within the scope of their
17 practice.

18 (7) Dentists may sign death certificates the same as physicians, when necessary in the
19 line of their profession.

20 (8) Nothing in this chapter shall apply to a legally licensed doctor of medicine unless
21 he or she practices dentistry as a specialty.

22 (9) Nothing in this chapter shall apply to a practitioner of dentistry duly licensed by
23 another state or the District of Columbia while making a clinical demonstration
24 before a dental society, convention, association of dentists, or a dental school.

25 **(10) (a) The board shall pilot a Rural Dental Fellows Network for the purpose of the**
26 **retention of dental professionals in the Commonwealth, to be available to**
27 **all Kentucky dentists, to provide:**

- 1 1. Individual stipends for renewal programs in accordance with
 2 subsection (2) of this section;
 3 2. Mentorship programs;
 4 3. Telehealth access in accordance with KRS 313.060;
 5 4. Annual regional convenings;
 6 5. Access to the Rural Dental Fellows Network at no cost for all dentists
 7 awarded funding under subsection (3) of Section 1 of this Act; and
 8 (b) The board shall operate the pilot until July 1, 2036, unless extended by an
 9 act of the General Assembly.

10 ➔Section 4. The Kentucky Department for Medicaid Services shall increase
 11 reimbursement rates for dental services delivered to Medicaid beneficiaries in a federally
 12 designated health professional shortage area by twenty-five percent (25%). A state-
 13 funded technical assistance unit shall provide credentialing and billing support for rural
 14 providers.

15 ➔Section 5. There is hereby appropriated General Fund moneys in the amount of:

16 (1) \$4,400,000 in each fiscal year of the 2026-2028 fiscal biennium to the Center
 17 of Excellence in Rural Health budget unit under the University of Kentucky for the
 18 purpose of subsection (3) of Section 1 of this Act;

19 (2) \$600,000 in each fiscal year of the 2026-2028 fiscal biennium to the Office of
 20 the Kentucky Board of Dentistry for the purpose of implementation of the Rural Dental
 21 Fellows Network created in Section 3 of this Act; and

22 (3) \$1,000,000 in each fiscal year of the 2026-2028 fiscal biennium to the
 23 Department for Medicaid Services for the purpose of providing increased reimbursement
 24 rates in accordance with Section 4 of this Act.

25 ➔Section 6. If the Cabinet for Health and Family Services or the Department for
 26 Medicaid Services determines that a state plan amendment, waiver, or any other form of
 27 authorization or approval from any federal agency to implement Section 4 of this Act is

1 necessary to prevent the loss of federal funds or to comply with federal law, the cabinet
2 or department:

3 (1) Shall, within 90 days after the effective date of this Act, request the necessary
4 federal authorization or approval to implement Section 4 of this Act; and

5 (2) May only delay implementation of the provisions of Section 4 of this Act for
6 which federal authorization or approval was deemed necessary until the federal
7 authorization or approval is granted.

8 ➔Section 7. Whereas it is critical to ensure the provision of accessible dental care
9 to the citizens of the Commonwealth, an emergency is declared to exist, and this Act
10 takes effect July 1, 2026.

11 ➔Section 8. This Act may be cited as the Rural Dental Incentive and Access
12 Program Act.