

# SENATOR RICARDO LARA

## LEGISLATIVE FACT SHEET

### Medical DREAMER Opportunity Act Senate Bill 1139

#### **Summary:**

SB 1139 seeks to address the chronic shortage of medical professionals in underserved communities by ensuring that all people, regardless of their immigration status, have access to the state's scholarship and loan forgiveness programs for health professionals.

#### **Background:**

Under the Affordable Care Act more Californians than ever are insured, many with specific cultural and linguistic barriers to care. In addition, the state continues to face service shortages of primary care providers.

Under SB 1159, beginning in 2016, individuals who have met all requirements for licensure in a profession regulated by the Department of Consumer Affairs, can apply to a health professional board for a professional license, using either a social security number (SSN) or an individual taxpayer identification number (ITIN).

Expanded access to licensure helps California meet the cultural and linguistic needs of its diverse, newly insured and medically-underserved populations. Undocumented providers would be uniquely positioned to serve these diverse and underserved communities.

Housed within the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development (OSHPD), the Health Professions Education Foundation (HPEF) is a statutorily created non-profit foundation that awards scholarships and loan repayments, targeting health professionals (e.g., physicians, nurses, clinical social workers, therapists, medical assistants, medical laboratory technicians, and dental hygienist) who are able to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate care within medically underserved areas.

HPEF is funded through administrative fines and penalties on health plans, Proposition 63, and various other grants, in addition to health professional licensing surcharges. Recipients of the HPEF scholarship or loan repayment programs can receive maximum awards of \$4,000 - \$105,000 depending on the scholarship or loan forgiveness award.

#### **Problem:**

Most undocumented students face major challenges financing their education. Many struggle to access loans, and do not qualify for federal loan forgiveness programs.

Despite the ability for undocumented individuals to apply for a professional license, the HPEF program application does not allow the ITIN as a substitution for an SSN.

#### **Solution:**

By continuing efforts made to remove academic and professional barriers to undocumented students, SB 1139 would ensure that all individuals who wish to pursue a medical profession may compete for scholarships and loan repayments available under the HPEF, if they have met all other conditions of the program. It would enable an applicant to provide an ITIN in lieu of a SSN, and prohibit the HPEF from barring an applicant based on his or her immigration status. Undocumented health professionals deserve to compete in state programs that help mitigate the cost of their training, especially when their licensing fees contribute to these very programs.

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