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JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH PASSES PRIMARY CARE BILL

Bill filed by Co-Chair Jeffrey Sánchez supporting the practice of primary care in the Commonwealth passes unanimously

BOSTON—The Joint Committee on Public Health voted unanimously in favor of *An act supporting the practice of primary care in the commonwealth*. Sponsored by Representative Jeffrey Sánchez, co-chair of the Committee, the bill eases statutory burdens to maximize the role of physician assistants and nurse practitioners in order to improve access to care for patients and free up physicians' time for complicated cases requiring their expertise.

"While Massachusetts' 2006 health reform made incredible gains in coverage, further work is required to transform the health care workforce into a more team-based approach to primary care," Sánchez said. "As the Commonwealth moves forward in payment reform, it is crucial that we have a strong primary care workforce that can ensure all our residents are healthy and have access to quality care."

In the context of payment reform, the Rand Report to the Special Commission on the Health Care Payment System projected savings up to \$8.4 billion over 10 years if we enhanced patient care through increased utilization of nurse practitioners and physician assistants.

Increasing the number of primary care practitioners requires a multi-faceted approach. The bill reported out of Committee was amended to include a special commission on family physicians and other primary care physicians in community care settings. Recognizing the importance of primary care physicians in Massachusetts, the special commission is tasked with examining opportunities and challenges faced by these physicians, including workforce needs in community health centers; opportunities to improve the training of primary care physicians in leadership roles and in practicing in a coordinated, team-based approach to primary care; barriers to increasing the ability to train family physicians in community health centers; and the contributions the University of Massachusetts Medical School Learning Contract has made in increasing the primary care workforce in the Commonwealth and recommendations for its improvement, among other issues.

The Committee also favorably reported bills relating to the scope of practice of optometrists and podiatrists, allowing for these providers to treat more conditions within the scope of their education and training, increasing access to these services.

Other bills reported favorably include *An Act to eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities in the Commonwealth*, *An Act to establish community based grant programs to eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities in the Commonwealth* and *An Act to increase routine screening for HIV*.

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