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Submitted by:

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The Nevada Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (Nevada WICHE) was established in 1959 and receives its general authority under NRS 397. Nevada WICHE is an independent commission within the Nevada state government as well as a participating member of the multistate Western Regional Education Compact (the Compact) comprised of 16 western states and territories. The Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (Regional WICHE) is a congressionally chartered organization that administers membership in the Compact.

Nevada WICHE carries out the goals, objectives and programs of the Compact within this state, and shares resources with Nevada's higher education institutions and safety net providers to help meet the educational and health care needs of the residents of Nevada. Nevada WICHE program administrators identify and prioritize critical gaps in the statewide health care workforce and, in response, provide loan forgiveness and recruitment and retention programs, as well as promote student exchange programs. The programs Nevada WICHE currently offers are the regional compact's Professional Student Exchange Program (PSEP), and the state-administered Health Care Access Program (HCAP). By offering incentives to health sector students and practitioners, Nevada WICHE contributes to the supply of high need health professionals throughout the state.

Benefits to *students* that are provided by the Nevada WICHE programs include:

- Access to out-of-state professional programs often not available in Nevada
- Expanded options for attending educational institutions that meet individual needs
- Financial assistance to make education more affordable

Benefits to the *state* that are provided by the programs include:

- Avoiding costly and unnecessary duplication of programs and facilities by offering access to institutions in other states
- Guaranteed educated workforce in high-need professional fields
- Health services to Nevadans in geographic areas of health care fields of greatest need
- Economic impacts contributed by Nevada WICHE's working professionals

NRS 397 has not been comprehensively updated since approximately 1997. Since then, modifications to Nevada WICHE's programs have been made in response to the shifting educational and health care needs of Nevadans. Therefore, Nevada WICHE is requesting the following changes to NRS 397 to update statutes for increased efficiencies and effectiveness of its programs.

Sections 1 & 2 adds those states and territories that have joined the Compact after 1969.

Section 3 adds general regulatory language authorizing the Nevada commissioners to adopt regulations to carry out the provisions of NRS 397. Nevada WICHE's existing regulations are located under Nevada Administrative Code (NAC) 397, but general regulatory language is currently not found within its statute.

Section 3 also authorizes the Nevada WICHE Commission to delegate to staff responsibilities that are identified within statute. The Commission has determined that, in some cases, delegation will prevent potential delays in administering some program activities.

Sections 4, 6-18 update general program language throughout the statute for increased clarity and comprehension. Changes primarily include:

- Replacing the language "student" with "participant", "applicant" or "recipient" for increased clarification of the types of individuals who are accessing programs.
- Adding the language "the three Nevada State Commissioners" and "the Nevada Office of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education" to distinguish between the state and regional commissions' responsibilities.
- Replacing the name of Nevada WICHE's account for programs from "Fund for Student Loans" to its current name, "Loan & Stipend Fund".

Section 5 states that the Nevada Commission, and not the Regional office, shall choose from among Nevada's HCAP program applicants to receive support. This language clarifies it is the responsibility of the Nevada WICHE office to administer the state-specific HCAP program; the Regional WICHE office is not affiliated with this program.

Section 5 also identifies the definition of "support fee" to include "stipend" as a category of funding under the HCAP program as identified in NRS 397.0617. The intent of Nevada WICHE's HCAP is to provide financial support in return for providing professional health care services in workforce shortage areas and/or with underserved populations. In the upcoming biennium, the FY 2016-2017 budget proposes support for a HCAP pilot "stipend program" in collaboration with the Regional WICHE office and the State of Nevada's Division of Public & Behavioral Health. The program will increase the number of mental health practitioners in the state by creating new nationally accredited psychology internships in Nevada, as well as assist nursing students with obtaining psychiatric credentialing. This legislation will expand high-need health care services to Nevadans by

establishing funding type and guidelines for participation in Nevada WICHE's proposed HCAP stipend program.

Finally, Section 5 requires the Regional WICHE office to provide the Nevada Commissioners a list of Nevada applicants for the regional PSEP program. Although it is not standard operating procedure by the regional office to provide this information to any state in the Compact, this new language was added in the bill. *(Please see proposed amendment to this language.)*

Section 7 expands the definition of "underserved" as necessary to meet the intent and requirements of the HCAP program. HCAP offers participants funding in return for providing professional health care services to those in greatest need of assistance in the state, or the "underserved". This section adds language to expand authorized services from underserved geographic "areas" to also include underserved "populations", such as veterans, children, Medicare/Medicaid patients, etc. This ensures WICHE's practitioners are serving people in need and not just geographic locations.

Section 7 also makes the required service time and repayment among WICHE's participants more equitable. Existing legislation indicates that as a condition to receiving a support fee under the HCAP program, participants must provide two (2) years of service. The revised legislation will allow HCAP participants to provide a year of service per year of funding received, with a maximum of two (2) years with an underserved population or in a health services shortage area as required by statute. If the service is not provided, the full support fee converts to a loan to be repaid back to the State.

Section 8 transfers existing statutory language from NRS 397.050 to NRS 397.062. The transfer clarifies that funds are placed under WICHE's Administrative Expenses account, from which all Regional WICHE dues and administrative expenses are currently paid.

Section 17 expands areas identified in NRS 397.0685 as "rural" to also include high-need medically underserved areas and populations. Existing language states a PSEP practitioner may receive a 1-year reduction in required service if he or she has been consistently working in a "rural" area. Rural areas may not necessarily be workforce shortage areas. This section expands the types of qualifying locations that may be considered for a reduction in service time. *(Please see proposed amendment to this language.)*

The Nevada office of the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education sincerely appreciates the Committee addressing these statutory modifications to NRS 397 and welcomes any questions you may have.