REQUESTING THAT THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH, WELFARE, AND LABOR STUDY THE NEED FOR CHANGES TO THE COMMUNITY MATCH RURAL PHYSICIAN RECRUITMENT PROGRAM.

WHEREAS, the Community Match Rural Physician Recruitment Program was created in 1995 to increase the number of physicians practicing medicine in rural communities in Arkansas by allowing physicians to receive funds for practicing full-time primary care medicine in a rural community in Arkansas; and

WHEREAS, under § 6-81-701, a "qualified rural community" means an area reasonably determined by the Arkansas Rural Medical Practice Student Loan and Scholarship Board to be medically underserved; and

WHEREAS, under § 6-81-701, "medically underserved" means an area that has unmet needs for medical services due to factors including without limitation the ratio of primary care physicians to population, the infant mortality rate, the percentage of population with incomes below the federal poverty level as it existed on January 1, 2007, the percentage of resident individuals sixty (60) years of age and older, the percentage of physicians sixty (60) years of age and older, accessibility within the area to primary care medicine, and other relevant criteria the Arkansas Rural Medical Practice Student Loan and Scholarship Board deems necessary for a determination of unmet needs for medical services; and

WHEREAS, under § 6-81-701, "primary care medicine" means health care provided in one (1) of the following areas of practices: family medicine, general internal medicine, general internal medicine and pediatrics, general pediatrics, general obstetrics and gynecology, general surgery, emergency medicine, and geriatrics; and

WHEREAS, the Community Match Rural Physician Recruitment Program obligates a physician to practice full-time primary care medicine in a qualified rural community for four (4) years; and
WHEREAS, eligibility for the Community Match Rural Physician Recruitment Program is dependent on the physician being a graduate of the College of Medicine of the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences or any accredited medical school in the United States; and

WHEREAS, a physician can apply to the Arkansas State Medical Board for a license to practice medicine if the individual is a graduate of: a recognized United States or Canadian medical school whose entrance requirements and course of instruction have been approved by the Council on Medical Education of the American Medical Association; a Canadian eclectic medical school which has been approved by the Council on Medical Education of the National Eclectic Medical Association; or a foreign medical school whose entrance requirements and course of instruction have been approved by the Arkansas State Medical Board; and

WHEREAS, the eligibility requirements for the Community Match Rural Physician Recruitment Program limit the pool of possible participating physicians while the Arkansas State Medical Board allows additional physicians to practice in Arkansas; and

WHEREAS, the majority of the Arkansas is medically underserved pursuant to the standards of the Department of Health; and

WHEREAS, additional physicians that could be recruited under the Community Match Rural Physician Recruitment Program if the eligibility requirements were broadened could help reduce the medically underserved areas across the state; and

WHEREAS, for the health of its citizens, the General Assembly should pursue efforts to improve and increase access to health care by utilizing the Community Match Rural Physician Recruitment Program and similar programs to their full capabilities,

NOW THEREFORE,
BE IT PROPOSED BY THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH, WELFARE, AND LABOR OF
THE NINETY-THIRD GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF ARKANSAS:

THAT the House Committee On Public Health, Welfare, And Labor study the
needs for changes to the Community Match Rural Physician Recruitment Program
to improve and increase access to health care in medically underserved areas.

Respectfully submitted,

Representative Mary Bentley
District 73

By: JMB/JMB