



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

PO Box 47990 • Olympia, Washington 98504-7990

February 9, 2005

The Honorable Phyllis Kenney
Washington State House of Representatives
Higher Education Committee Chair
330 John L. O'Brien Building
Post Office Box 40600
Olympia, Washington 98504-0600

Dear Representative Kenney:

I am writing to support House Bill 1586, relating to college and university admissions practices, scheduled to be heard before your committee tomorrow.

The State Board of Health believes this legislation could improve the diversity of our health workforce by allowing greater diversity in academic programs that educate health professionals. Research shows greater health workforce diversity is likely to lead to fewer disparities in health status among Washington's increasingly diverse communities. The Board's Committee on Health Disparities found that:

- Communities of color in Washington State experience substantial inequities in terms of burden of disease.
- Research demonstrates that minority providers may be more effective in addressing cultural, linguistic, and trust issues that exist for many minority patients. Health outcomes can be improved when the race and ethnicity of health professionals reflects the populations they serve.
- Health professionals from underserved communities, both minority and rural, are much more likely to return to and serve those communities.
- Ethnic and minority health care professionals are seriously underrepresented in the health care workforce when compared to the overall population of the state.
- Not all health care professional shortages are uniform across the state. Underserved, minority, and rural communities are likely to feel this shortage more acutely and for longer periods.

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Because of these findings, the Board supports giving colleges and universities some flexibility in considering race, color, ethnicity, or national origin as a positive factor in their admission and transfer policies and as part of a holistic review of applicants' qualities and experiences.

A more holistic review of applicants' qualities and experiences is beneficial not just for less privileged individuals, but also for Washington as a whole. Allowing a more diverse population the opportunity to become part of the health workforce through higher education is likely to reduce health disparities through improved health care access, health care quality, and health outcomes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Thomas Locke". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'T'.

Thomas Locke, MD, MPH
Chair, Washington State Board of Health

cc: House Higher Education Committee Members
The Honorable Jeanne Kohl-Welles
Ms. Christina Hulet, Governor's Executive Policy Office
Ms. Ree Sailors, Governor's Executive Policy Office
Ms. Chris Townley, Department of Health
Washington State Board of Health Members
Craig McLaughlin, State Board of Health