

Gray, Cannella introduce new legislation to help train more doctors in the Valley

By Sun-Star
Staff

Assemblyman Adam Gray, D-Merced, and state Sen. Anthony Cannella, R-Ceres, have introduced new legislation that promotes the training of more doctors in the San Joaquin Valley.

Assembly Bill 174 would provide financial stability and help expand enrollment in UC Merced's San Joaquin Valley Program in Medical Education, according to a press release.

The program, also called PRIME, is a joint program among UC Merced, UC Davis School of Medicine, and the University of California, San Francisco, Fresno Medical Education Program. PRIME aims to train the next generation of physicians in hopes that they will stick around the San Joaquin Valley.

The program kicked off with a \$5 million grant from the United Health Foundation in 2006, and enrolled its first round of students in 2011.

The new bill appropriates \$1.85 million to expand PRIME's enrollment from eight students per year to 12. The bill also allocates \$1 million to allow UC Merced to conduct the necessary research to submit a medical school proposal to the UC Board of Regents.

AB 174 is a reintroduction of Gray's AB 2232 from 2014, which passed out of the Assembly but hit a roadblock in the Senate Appropriations Committee.

According to the press release from Gray's office, this new legislation comes at a time when health care access in the Valley is being greatly affected by its shortage of doctors.

"Despite increased access to health insurance under the Affordable Care Act, emergency rooms in the Valley are increasingly congested," Gray said. "There are simply not enough doctor's offices here to meet the needs of the region."

According to Gray, PRIME is a tremendous resource for Valley students wishing to attend medical school because it allows students access to facilities that do not exist in the Valley, while conducting clinical rotations locally.

"Our aspiring medical students should not need to travel to a different part of the state in order to achieve their dreams," Gray said. "They were born here, and they want to learn and practice here. But without the necessary medical infrastructure they need to become doctors, they have no choice. It is time to give them that choice."

In 2008, the UC regents authorized UC Merced to develop a planning effort to establish a medical school, in recognition of the shortage of physicians in the Valley. Because that authorization did not include funding to conduct that planning, UC Merced has been unable to submit such a proposal.

"Currently, the San Joaquin Valley is disproportionately affected by California's physician shortage with access to health care 31 percent lower than the rest of the state," Cannella said in the press release, "and this will only worsen as the Affordable Care Act continues to expand health care insurance."