

TNAFP PASSES LOAN REPAYMENT BILL AMID DRAMATIC LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Major Advocacy Win Should Help Attract and Retain More Family Physicians

The Tennessee General Assembly drew national media attention in 2023 during a drama-filled session that included varying degrees of scandalous legislator behavior and climaxed with the expulsion (and subsequent re-entry) of two Democratic lawmakers as protestors called for gun control in the aftermath of the tragic Covenant School shooting in Nashville.

TNAFP worked behind the public fray to monitor healthcare-related bills and advance one key initiative that promises to improve healthcare access and expand the primary care workforce in Tennessee.

From the outset, the hot-button healthcare issues were **abortion, gender-affirming care, and vaccines**. TNAFP deliberately refrained from taking any active lobby position on these issues but tried to keep members informed of pertinent movements affecting their practices and patients.

- The first bill introduced and passed in the session (SB1/HB1) prohibits medical procedures from being administered to or performed on minors when the purpose of the medical procedure is to (1) Enable a minor to identify with, or live as, a purported identity inconsistent with the minor's sex or (2) Treat purported discomfort or distress from a discordance between the minor's sex and asserted identity. Public Chapter 1 takes effect July 1, 2023.
- Anti-vaccine groups kept hold over lawmakers and the general public, with laws like HB252/SB644 (now public chapter 296) and SB1111/HB1380 (awaiting governor signature as of mid-May) further limiting or restricting vaccine administration for minors. TNAFP supports grassroots efforts by Tennessee Families for Vaccines (tnfamiliesforvaccines.org) to shift the rhetoric from misguided fear to evidence-based science and promote public health policies that include immunization for children and adults.
- The most notable abortion-related bill, sponsored by Sen. Richard Briggs, MD (R - Knoxville), made changes to help protect physicians. HB883/SB745 (now public chapter 313) amends the 2019 trigger law to eliminate a criminal offense for a licensed physician if, through the physician's "reasonable medical judgment," the abortion is necessary to prevent the death of or serious injury to the pregnant woman. The bill was signed into law on April 28 and took immediate effect. Earlier efforts to include provisions for a situation where a fetus would not be viable outside the womb and to create exemptions for rape and incest failed.

TNAFP's top legislative priority was establishing a **loan repayment program for family physicians**. HB1281/SB781 moved through committees in both chambers without amendments, passed the House floor on April 19 and the Senate floor two days later and was signed by Governor Bill Lee on May 11. It takes effect July 1, 2023.

What the Academy initially expected to be a multi-year effort passed through the legislature in year one. Legislators expressed widespread support for the concept during discussions with physician leaders and staff but

tempered expectations in terms of funding. The legislature's primary task annually is appropriating state resources in a balanced budget, and with so many competing interests, it can be difficult to secure funding for a new initiative. Lawmakers found a way to work it into the budget, however, in the final days of the legislative session.

While there are some loan repayment incentive programs already in place in Tennessee, TNAFP's bill creates a program uniquely designed to attract and retain family physicians in rural areas.

- Applicants must be graduates of an accredited medical school and actively enrolled in a family medicine residency program in Tennessee.
- Eligible recipients can receive up to \$40,000 per year for up to five years in exchange for practicing in a designated health shortage area during the 5-year period.

Now, the work begins to implement the program. TNAFP hopes to work with the Tennessee Department of Health in a supportive role as the department administers the program to help promote the program, identify candidates, and ensure all spots are filled so it can achieve the stated goals of attracting more family physicians to train and plant long-term practice roots in Tennessee.

Please thank the following sponsors and co-sponsors for supporting HB1281/SB781 and shepherding its passage!

- Senator Rusty Crowe (R - Johnson City)
Senate sponsor: sen.rusty.crowe@capitol.tn.gov
- Senator Ed Jackson (R - Jackson)
Senate co-sponsor: sen.ed.jackson@capitol.tn.gov
- Senator Raumesh Akbari (D - Memphis)
Senate co-sponsor: sen.raumesh.akbari@capitol.tn.gov
- Representative John Holsclaw (R - Elizabethton)
House sponsor: rep.john.holsclaw@capitol.tn.gov
- Representative Sabi Kumar, MD (R - Springfield)
House co-sponsor: rep.sabi.kumar@capitol.tn.gov



TNAFP President James D. Holt, MD, FFAFP testified before the Senate Education Committee in the Tennessee General Assembly on March 15.

As many TNAFP members know, **scope of practice** has been a perennial legislative issue for more than a decade, as nurse practitioners and physician assistants attempt to expand their autonomy and erode physician oversight. Approximately half of U.S. states have modified laws to allow nurses to practice independently, without any physician supervision or required collaboration, but physician advocacy groups in Tennessee have successfully persuaded lawmakers to maintain important professional collaboration.

The Academy continues participating in the Coalition for Collaborative Care, a consortium of medical societies organized to oppose independent practice for nurse practitioners and PAs and promote physician-led, team-based care models. The coalition applied for and received grant funding from the American Medical Association Scope of Practice Partnership to hire a dedicated lobbyist who spreadheads efforts in Nashville and works with the

Tennessee Coalition for Collaborative Care

- American College of Physicians – Tennessee Chapter
- Tennessee Academy of Family Physicians
- Tennessee Academy of Ophthalmology
- Tennessee Academy of Pediatrics
- Tennessee Chapter of the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecology
- Tennessee Chapter of the American College of Surgeons
- Tennessee College of Emergency Physicians
- Tennessee Dermatology Society
- Tennessee Group Practice Coalition
- Tennessee Medical Association
- Tennessee Orthopedic Society
- Tennessee Osteopathic Medical Association
- Tennessee Society of Anesthesiologists

coalition stakeholder groups on strategic efforts to speak with a united voice for physicians.

A bill (SB1171/HB1272) sponsored by Art Swan (R – Maryville) that would have essentially granted full independent practice for physician assistants did not make it out of committee, and no other bills substantially affected scope in terms of physician leadership in a team-based model. Other bills made minor modifications to scope of practice.

- SB72/HB1195 allows nurse practitioners and PAs to refer for physical therapy. The bill was signed into law on April 4 (public chapter 107).
- SB672/HB1051 authorizes advanced practice nurses and PAs to execute a certificate for emergency diagnosis, evaluation, and treatment. The bill was signed into law on April 6 (public chapter 672).

A Senate workgroup had met prior to the 2023 session to discuss scope of practice and try to identify a proposal but their efforts did not materialize into a bill. TNAFP was informed during session that the same (or similar) workgroup intends to reconvene during the summer and fall and approach 2024 with a recommendation that will reflect a compromise for all parties and could include a moratorium on any related legislation for five years. The Academy will continue working with the Coalition for Collaborative Care to engage in those discussions and advocate for solutions that uphold patient safety and quality of care.

On May 8, after the legislature had adjourned for the calendar year, Governor Bill Lee announced that he will call for the Tennessee General Assembly to convene a special legislative session on August 21 to take on the issue of gun violence and, in according to the statement from the governor’s office, “strengthen public safety and preserve constitutional rights.”

The TNAFP Legislative Committee will meet this summer and fall to discuss ideas and begin preparing for the 2024 session. Contact Executive Director Dave Chaney (dchaney@tnafp.org or 615.370.5144) to recommend an idea or submit a request for the committee to consider.

Thank you, TNAFP Doctors of the Day!

Tennessee family physicians were a consistent presence on Capitol Hill in 2023 thanks to these volunteers, who showed up to meet with lawmakers and carry the message on important issues affecting the specialty, members and their patients.

- February 15 – Grant Studebaker, MD, FAAFP
- February 22 – Michael McCutchen, MD

- March 1 – Kenneth Beaty, MD
- March 8 – Trae Bates, DO, FAAFP and Thomas Pennington, DO
- March 15 – Jim Holt, MD, FAAFP
- March 22 – Wes Dean, MD, FAAFP and Syndey Clark (LMU student)
- March 29 – Kenneth Bielak, MD, FAAFP
- April 5 – Anthony Wilson, MD, FAAFP

