



Assembly Member **SANDRÉ SWANSON**  
News Release

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## Legislation To Aid Medically Underserved Communities Gains Additional Momentum, Moves To Assembly Floor

**(Sacramento)** – AB 646, authored by Assemblymember Sandré R. Swanson (D-Alameda), passed the Assembly Appropriations Committee yesterday on a bi-partisan, unanimous vote of 17-0. The bill will attract physicians to the state's medically underserved communities in urban and rural communities by allowing California Health Care Districts that serve these populations to directly hire and employ physicians.

Speaking before the Committee, Assemblymember Swanson stated, "What we have faced in California for the last fifty years is not a shortage, but a mal-distribution of doctors. Inner cities and rural areas have faced chronically low levels of access to physicians. AB 646 creates a practical solution to this persistent problem with minimal cost to the state."

Current law prohibits the employment of physicians by corporations and other artificial entities, even though there are several exemptions to this prohibition in law and practice. Public entities, such as State and County health agencies, currently employ thousands of physicians statewide. Health Care Districts, on the other hand, are the only public healthcare providers in California prohibited from direct physician employment.

In addition to authorizing the direct hiring of physicians, AB 646 will protect patients' and physicians' rights by prohibiting Districts from interfering in medical decisions. The bill also calls for the Office of Statewide Health Planning and Development, in consultation with the Medical Board of California and the state's Department of Public Health, to review the impact that direct employment of physicians has on access and quality of care.

Peter Gambee, representative of the Association of California Health Care Districts, a co-sponsor of AB 646, testified previously in favor of the bill. "AB 646 is an important step toward dealing with a major health care problem that is quickly becoming a crisis. We greatly appreciate Assemblymember Swanson's leadership on this issue."

"Forty-five other states allow the direct employment of physicians by specified health care facilities," Assemblymember Swanson stated. "It is time for California to address the growing health care needs of our medically underserved by giving the Health Care Districts that serve these communities the power to directly hire doctors."

The bill advances to the Assembly floor, where it is expected to be heard within the next two weeks.

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