A bill to be entitled
An act relating to the Dental Student Loan Repayment Program; creating s. 381.4019, F.S.; establishing the Dental Student Loan Repayment Program to support dentists who practice in public health programs located in certain underserved areas; providing definitions; requiring the Department of Health to establish the loan program; providing for the award of funds; providing the maximum number of years funds may be awarded; providing eligibility requirements; requiring the department to adopt rules; providing an effective date.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. Section 381.4019, Florida Statutes, is created to read:

381.4019 Dental Student Loan Repayment Program.—Subject to the availability of funds, the Legislature establishes the Dental Student Loan Repayment Program to promote access to dental care by supporting qualified dentists who treat medically underserved populations in dental health professional shortage areas or medically underserved areas. The Legislature recognizes that maintaining good oral health is integral to overall health status and that the good health of residents in this state is an important contributing factor in state economic development. Better health, including better oral health, increases workplace productivity, reduces the burden of health care costs, and improves the cognitive development of children.
(1) As used in this section, the term:

(a) “Dental health professional shortage area” means a geographic area designated as such by the Health Resources and Services Administration of the United States Department of Health and Human Services.

(b) “Department” means the Department of Health.

(c) “Loan program” means the Dental Student Loan Repayment Program.

(d) “Medically underserved area” means a geographic area, an area having a special population, or a facility which is designated by department rule as a health professional shortage area as defined by federal regulation and which has a shortage of dental health professionals who serve Medicaid recipients and other low-income patients.

(e) “Public health program” means a county health department, the Children’s Medical Services program, a federally funded community health center, a federally funded migrant health center, or other publicly funded or nonprofit health care program designated by the department.

(2) The department shall establish a dental student loan repayment program to benefit state-licensed dentists who demonstrate, as required by department rule, active employment in a public health program that serves Medicaid recipients and other low-income patients and is located in a dental health professional shortage area or a medically underserved area.

(3) The department shall award funds from the loan program to repay the student loans of a dentist who meets the requirements of subsection (2). An award may not exceed $50,000 per year per eligible dentist.
(4) A participant in the loan program is eligible to receive funds for at least 1 year, up to a maximum of 5 years. The period of obligated service begins when the dentist begins employment as provided in subsection (2).

(5) A dentist is not eligible to participate in the loan program if:

(a) The dentist’s employment by a public health program is terminated;

(b) The dentist’s practice in a designated health professional shortage area or medically underserved area is terminated;

(c) The dentist’s participation in the Florida Medicaid program is terminated; or

(d) The dentist knowingly fails to disclose any participation in fraudulent activity.

(6) The department shall adopt rules to administer the loan program.

Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2018.