

**TESTIMONY OF
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BEFORE THE
HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEE
Tuesday, March 4, 2008**

**SB 470, An Act Concerning The Shortage Of Nursing And Allied Health
Professionals**

Good afternoon Senator Hartley, Representative Willis, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. I am Liz Beaudin, Director of Nursing and Workforce Initiatives for the Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) and I appreciate the opportunity to testify on behalf of CHA and its members in support of **SB 470, An Act Concerning The Shortage Of Nursing And Allied Health Professionals.**

SB 470 calls for the establishment of a faculty scholarship for service program, administered by the Department of Higher Education, to encourage state residents to become qualified faculty members of nursing or allied health education programs within the state. Students pursuing master's and doctoral degrees that would qualify them to become faculty members would receive grants from within available appropriations to cover the costs of tuition, fees, and books in exchange for a period of service within programs of nursing and allied health as determined by the Commissioner of Higher Education.

SB 470 also calls for the Board of Governors of Higher Education, in consultation with the Commissioner of Public Health, the State Board of Examiners for Nursing, and the Connecticut Allied Health Workforce Policy Board, to establish a loan forgiveness program for state residents who become faculty members of nursing or allied health education programs within the state. Loans would be forgiven for residents who remain as faculty members for a period of five consecutive years.

Additional provisions of SB 470 include the establishment of an incentive program administered by the Office of Workforce Competitiveness to provide grants to institutions of higher education that work collaboratively with hospitals to augment nursing and allied health faculty resources; the establishment of a program by the Department of Higher Education to fund improvements to facilities housing nursing and allied health programs to expand available capacity of classrooms and laboratory capacity; the establishment of a program by the Department of Social Services to provide grants to not-for-profit hospitals within the state to acquire patient lifting equipment; and the establishment of scholarship and loan forgiveness programs administered by the Department of Higher Education for state residents who are nursing or emergency medical technician students.

It is imperative to institute initiatives now that will begin to address the growing and projected severe shortage of nurses and other healthcare professionals in our state. Connecticut is expected to experience one of the worst nursing shortages in the nation, with a shortfall of registered nurses projected by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) as high as 22,400 by the year 2020. The confluence of rising healthcare demand, aging of the healthcare workforce, and shrinking numbers of individuals from which to draw future healthcare workers places the state at significant risk with regard to the ability to provide adequate healthcare for the public. Connecticut is especially vulnerable to these disturbing trends, as it has one of the oldest populations in the U.S., setting the stage for significant healthcare demand and simultaneous retirement of a large contingent of healthcare professionals.

While there is substantial interest on the part of potential students in Connecticut and across the nation in pursuing a nursing education, these aspirations, which would lead to vital support for the healthcare system, cannot be fully realized because of faculty shortages and the need for resources to support enrollment expansion. The National League for Nursing reported that 147,000 qualified applicants were turned away from nursing schools in the U.S. in 2005. Over 2,000 qualified applicants in Connecticut were unable to enter nursing programs during the years 2004 and 2005, according to the Connecticut League for Nursing, due to lack of faculty and other resources. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) reported that U.S. nursing schools turned away 42,866 qualified applicants from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs in 2006 for similar reasons. Concerns over an aging workforce and loss of needed resources to retirement are particularly germane to the nursing faculty shortage. According to the AACN, the average age of nurse faculty at retirement is 62.5 years, and currently nursing professors in the nation range in average age from approximately 50 to 59 years of age. These trends continue and are of concern for the state of Connecticut.

Addressing the healthcare workforce shortage will require a multi-year, multi-faceted approach. The provisions of SB470 are designed to remove barriers to educating nurses and other healthcare professionals by creating incentives to prepare more faculty members, by fostering collaboration between schools and hospitals to seek creative solutions to augment faculty resources, and by providing support to schools to fund facility improvements necessary to accommodate increased student capacity.

A program to provide grants to not-for-profit hospitals within the state to acquire patient lifting equipment, another provision of SB470, is focused on the protection and retention of the current healthcare workforce. Hospitals continue to be engaged in a variety of initiatives to recruit and retain nurses and other healthcare professionals, including the provision of salary increases, flexible hours, tuition reimbursement, full year residencies for new nurses, and others. Among these initiatives are safe lifting programs, designed to ensure patient safety as well as to prevent employee injury. An essential component of these programs is the use of mechanical lift equipment. Such equipment may include air inflated mats used to transfer patients from bed to stretcher; electrically powered devices that assist patients to move from a sitting to standing position; and ceiling mounted electrically powered lifts that safely move patients from bed to chair. Ready accessibility of lift equipment is critical to adequately support patient care and the staff providing it.

This means that hospitals must purchase multiple pieces of equipment for patient care units. The physical demands of providing patient care are increasing, especially as the bariatric patient population continues to grow, and this factor, coupled with an aging workforce, makes the provision of lift equipment all the more urgent.

With regard to scholarships and loan forgiveness for nursing and emergency technician students, CHA supports initiatives that are focused on assisting individuals to prepare to become caregivers and that serve to alleviate healthcare workforce shortages. This provision of SB470 is rightly one of the initiatives to be implemented within the multi-year, multifaceted approach mentioned earlier. Removing the barriers that prevent schools from admitting qualified nursing and allied health applicants to programs, and assisting hospitals to purchase equipment that will serve to protect and retain currently practicing caregivers are high priority initiatives in addressing the healthcare workforce shortage in Connecticut.

Thank you for consideration of our position. I am happy to answer any questions.

For additional information, contact CHA Government Relations at (203) 294-7310.