



**TESTIMONY OF
CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
SUBMITTED TO THE
HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEE
Thursday, March 2, 2006**

**HB 5528, An Act Establishing A Loan Forgiveness Program For Employees
In High Needs Occupations**

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony on **HB 5528, An Act Establishing A Loan Forgiveness Program For Employees In High Needs Occupations**.

HB 5528 establishes a loan forgiveness program for employees in high needs occupations. The bill does not specify which occupations will be considered high needs.

CHA supports HB 5528 and believes that it would assist in addressing current and future nursing and allied health profession shortages that are barriers to creating an adequate healthcare workforce. As the state with the seventh oldest population in the nation, Connecticut's demand for healthcare services is high and expected to grow significantly. It is critical to begin to build the pipeline of qualified healthcare workers now in order to avoid a devastating crisis in care going forward. A 55 percent shortfall between supply and demand of registered nurses is projected for Connecticut by the year 2020.

Of equal concern are workforce and faculty shortages in the allied health professions and pharmacy. These fields have received little attention despite growing practitioner shortages, enrollment declines, expected significant loss of faculty through retirement, and increasing demand for healthcare services

CHA applauds the Committee's effort to address the need for individuals to enter high need occupations and respectfully requests that the Committee during its deliberations include in the nursing, allied health and pharmacy in the definition of high need occupations.

We also would like to express our sincere appreciation to you, Senator Hartley, and to Representative Willis and the Committee for bringing attention and support to the critical issue of healthcare workforce shortages. Your support in advocating for the creation of a healthcare workforce database, the Allied Healthcare Workforce Policy Board, and, other such initiatives is greatly appreciated. As always, we stand ready to assist you in whatever ways we can to advance initiatives that will address the healthcare workforce shortage.

Thank you for your consideration of our position.

For additional information, contact CHA Government Relations at (203) 269-7310.