



**TESTIMONY
OF THE
CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE**

Tuesday, March 12, 2002

**SB 553, An Act Addressing The Shortage Of Radiological Technologists And
Other Allied Health Professionals And Adjusting The Nurse-To-Technician
Staffing Ratios For Kidney Dialysis Units**

The Connecticut Hospital Association appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony in support of proposed legislation to address the shortage of radiologic technologists and other allied health professionals. Connecticut's hospitals are facing a serious workforce shortage that is growing at an accelerating and alarming rate. Staff shortages are already affecting hospital capacity and care. Shortages are resulting in service cutbacks such as cancelled elective surgeries and delayed diagnostic tests. Shortages are causing patient diversions and delayed admissions. Lack of adequate regular staff has had a significant operating margin impact on our hospitals due to the required use of agency staff and overtime. And our chronic shortages continue to result in staff burnout and morale issues. To compound the problem, these staff shortages are occurring at a time when our hospitals are busier than ever. Patient census numbers are up, emergency department visits are up, and keeping hospital departments consistently staffed at appropriate levels is increasingly difficult.

CHA recently completed another hospital survey on vacancy rates. New data shows a continued upward trend in vacancy rates for many positions, especially in radiology/diagnostic imaging. Hospitals are facing chronic staff shortages in many key areas, including the diagnostic imaging, pharmacy, and laboratory professions addressed in this bill.

Our healthcare workforce is aging also – as is the general population. Our most recent hospital demographic information indicates that only about 8% of our hospital laboratory services

workforce is under age 30 while more than 31% is 50 or older. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population in Connecticut over age 65 is expected to grow 28% between 2000 and 2020. This, of course, is expected to significantly increase the demand for healthcare services. So while we have shortage issues now, *we anticipate that they will only intensify* as our state population ages, our current healthcare workforce retires and the demand for healthcare services skyrockets.

We believe the solution to our healthcare workforce shortage lies in an inclusive, collaborative approach: a public/private partnership focusing on:

- marketing healthcare careers,
- expanding educational resources and
- ensuring adequate resources for providers.

Senate Bill 553 will help by encouraging the expansion of weekend and evening courses and by providing a low-interest student loan and loan forgiveness program for certain allied health professions facing chronic shortages. While we support the bill overall, we would recommend some technical changes to ensure its accuracy and efficacy. We would like the Committee to consider extending the loan forgiveness schedule from two years to four years, and we recommend the deletion of any reference to state licensure for laboratory technology professionals as such licensure is not required in Connecticut.

Thank you for your consideration of our position.

KKH:cgb