



**TESTIMONY OF
CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
SUBMITTED TO THE
HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEE
Tuesday, February 22, 2022**

HB 5130, An Act Concerning Student Loan Forgiveness For Nonprofit Employees

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony concerning **HB 5130, An Act Concerning Student Loan Forgiveness For Nonprofit Employees**. CHA supports the legislation.

Since early 2020, hospitals and health systems have been at the center of Connecticut's response to the COVID-19 public health emergency, acting as a vital partner with the state and our communities. Hospitals expanded critical care capacity, procured essential equipment and supplies, and stood up countless community COVID-19 testing locations. Hospitals have been an essential component of the statewide vaccine distribution plan including efforts to reach and serve historically under-resourced communities disproportionately affected by the virus. Through it all, hospitals and health systems have continued to provide high-quality care for everyone, regardless of ability to pay. This tireless commitment to the COVID-19 response confirms the value of strong hospitals in Connecticut's public health infrastructure and the well-being of our communities and reinforces the need for a strong partnership between the state and hospitals.

Connecticut's hospital and health system workforce is the most critical element in the provision of quality and safe care—the most important role a hospital plays in a patient's life. Challenging that work, Connecticut's hospitals and health systems are experiencing a severe workforce shortage, the makings of which predate the pandemic, but which the pandemic has exacerbated and made acute.

Two years of COVID-19 response have left nurses, doctors, and other caregivers experiencing burnout, with some considering early retirement and others simply leaving acute care or healthcare altogether. Shortages that have been building in healthcare professions for years are now critical, most acute in nursing, but felt across disciplines. Hospital clinical units have a mix of highly experienced and less-seasoned caregivers. As some experienced professionals depart, they take with them clinical skills and years of hands-on practice, reducing the experience of the remaining teams, creating a practice gap.

High vacancy rates and employee turnover in hospitals are driving labor costs up, taking the cost of hospital care in the wrong direction.

Hospitals and health systems are working hard to retain the current workforce and recruit additional staff. Providing financial incentives, identifying opportunities for career advancement, and supporting continuing education are only a few of the ways they are working to support the workforce in the short-term. Over the long-term, they are partnering with colleges and technical schools to develop the curricula and training to support future healthcare needs and identifying the clinical placements that will be needed to support this enhanced training.

The loan repayment programs envisioned in HB 5130 would be an important asset to the state, and hospitals and health systems in retaining our healthcare workforce. The roles and responsibilities within hospitals and health systems often require advanced training or an advanced degree, meaning thousands of healthcare workers across the state have made a commitment to the education required to provide exceptional patient care and operate modern hospitals and health systems. This advanced education comes at considerable expense to individuals and their families.

We support the creation of both loan repayment programs described in the legislation. We are particularly appreciative of the program outlined in section 2 of the bill designed to support those healthcare employees who have been engaged in fighting the pandemic for almost two years now. The loan repayment program acknowledges their current dedication while also supporting their retention in the workforce over the coming years.

We appreciate the Committee's review of this legislation and encourage its support.

Thank you for your consideration of our position. For additional information, contact CHA Government Relations at (203) 294-7310.