



**TESTIMONY OF
CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
SUBMITTED TO THE
HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT
ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEE
Tuesday, March 8, 2022**

SB 251, An Act Expanding Training Programs For Careers In Health Care

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony concerning **SB 251, An Act Expanding Training Programs For Careers In Health Care**. CHA supports the bill, suggests strengthening its provisions, and encourages broader action to support the development and retention of the healthcare workforce.

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 that anticipate future healthcare needs and to identify the clinical placements that will be needed to support this enhanced training.

SB 251 would require: (1) the Office of Higher Education, in collaboration with the Department of Public Health, the Department of Labor, the Office of Workforce Strategy, the University of Connecticut, the University of Connecticut Health Center and the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities to develop an initiative to address the state's healthcare workforce shortage; (2) the Commissioner of Housing and the executive director of the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority to seek a partnership with a hospital located in the state to increase workforce housing options; and (3) the Chief Workforce Officer, in consultation with members of the Connecticut Hospital Association and representatives of the nursing home industry, to develop a plan to work with high schools in the state in order to encourage students to pursue careers in nursing.

Regarding the requirement on the Office of Higher Education, we would encourage the Committee to consider expanding the coordination requirement to ensure that the perspective of hospitals and health systems across the state are represented. As such, we encourage the addition of the Connecticut Hospital Association as a collaborating partner in section 1 of the bill.

CHA recognizes that access to affordable housing is an essential element to a comprehensive workforce strategy and we believe solutions may be needed in many areas of the state. We ask that Section 2 be amended to permit the examination of opportunities with multiple interested hospitals; specifically we ask that this provision be amended to read “the Commissioner of Housing and the executive director of the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority to seek a partnership with one or more hospitals located in the state to increase workforce housing options.”

Related to section 3 of the bill, we encourage the Committee to consider expanding the charge to the Office of Workforce Strategy and require the plan to go beyond just nursing and focus on all in-demand healthcare workforce jobs. In addition to nursing, hospitals and health systems have significant need to hire medical assistants, emergency department technicians, surgical assistants, and other certificate-level employees that also should be a focus of this work.

Beyond the provisions of the legislation, we encourage the Committee to consider broader and more aggressive action to confront the healthcare workforce shortage crisis.

We believe more comprehensive action is needed and should be on the scale and scope of what was outlined by Governor Hochul in New York—an initiative to grow that state's healthcare workforce by 20% over the next five years through a \$10 billion investment, including \$4 billion to support wages and bonuses for healthcare workers.

In order to enact such a program in Connecticut, we outline our strategy below.

Solutions to Address the Critical Healthcare Workforce Shortage

Retention and Recruitment—Bridge to Longer-Term Solutions

Use resources to financially assist healthcare providers and support:

- Incentives for remaining in or returning to hospital and health system employment
- Immediate temporary staffing, i.e., per diem, locum tenens, travelers
- Recruitment efforts for foreign-born clinical staff to supplement local and national recruitment efforts
- Recruitment of permanent staff, e.g., bonuses, housing, rental assistance, transportation, relocation expenses
- Programs designed to improve retention
 - Career growth and development pathways
 - Mentorship and career counseling
 - Diversity, equity, and inclusion programs

Improving the Education Pipeline

Support funding for:

- Additional faculty positions and available placements at nursing and allied health schools
- Tuition assistance, scholarships, and loan forgiveness programs for careers in healthcare
- Recruitment of students into healthcare education and training, including expanded career ladder programs
- Additional clinical placement opportunities

We appreciate the Committee's focus on this critical issue and encourage you to consider a broader approach to meeting the healthcare workforce challenges in our state.

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