



**TESTIMONY OF
CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
SUBMITTED TO THE
PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
Monday, March 21, 2022**

**SB 449, An Act Concerning The Recruitment And Retention Of
Physicians In The State**

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony concerning **SB 449, An Act Concerning The Recruitment And Retention Of Physicians In The State**. CHA supports all but Section 2 of the bill.

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.

We support the provisions of SB 449 that would create a physician loan reimbursement program for physicians educated, trained, and practicing in the state. We appreciate the three year moratorium on license renewal fees and the creation of a recruitment grant program to attract physicians from out-of-state. We also support work to expand medical residency programs, as described in the bill, and the bill's emphasis on addressing the effect medical liability insurance costs are having on patient care and service availability.

We do oppose Section 2 of the bill which makes changes to the current covenant not to compete state statutory framework. We request that it be stricken from the bill. The Office of Health Strategy (OHS) has convened, per Public Act No. 21-129, a Physician Practice Workgroup that is charged with examining this type of issue and we recommend that prior to any legislative change, the Workgroup have an opportunity to consider the issue.

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.