



**TESTIMONY OF
CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
SUBMITTED TO THE
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
Tuesday, March 28, 2023**

**HB 6901, An Act Concerning A Student Loan Reimbursement
Program For Certain Professionals**

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony concerning **HB 6901, An Act Concerning A Student Loan Reimbursement Program For Certain Professionals**.

Connecticut hospitals continue to meet the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and are now facing new challenges of treating sicker patients than they saw before the pandemic, with a dedicated but smaller workforce who are exemplary but exhausted. They are also experiencing significant financial hardships brought on by record inflation. Through it all, hospitals have been steadfast, providing high-quality care for everyone who walks through their doors, regardless of ability to pay.

Healthcare workers in Connecticut have been exceptional in responding to the pandemic and all of its impacts over the last three years. But it has taken a toll on them – adding more stress, leading to exhaustion and burnout. Challenges that existed before the pandemic have been exacerbated. Through it all, they have maintained exceptional care for patients.

As we continue to respond to the effects of the pandemic and its impact over the last three years and look to build the future healthcare delivery system in our state, we know that we need to expand Connecticut’s healthcare workforce.

Connecticut hospitals are working every day to support their workers and are on the forefront of creating new ways to keep hospital workers resilient and enhance retention and recruitment. Providing financial incentives, identifying opportunities for career advancement, and supporting continuing education are important ways hospitals are supporting the workforce. Additionally, hospitals are partnering with colleges and technical schools to develop curriculum and training to support future healthcare needs and identifying the clinical placements that will be needed to support this enhanced training.

We have also built a strong partnership with the Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS), working together to support initiatives to rapidly retrain Connecticut workers for jobs in healthcare

(CareerConneCT), create regional sector partnerships to enhance collaboration in communities across the state, develop healthcare career pathways for high school students, and influence the development of the CT Health Horizons program.

The last program noted, CT Health Horizons, is the product of the work the General Assembly completed during its last session, supported by the allocation of \$35 million in American Recovery Act dollars. The program and funding are critical to the development of the future nursing and behavioral health workforce in the state.

We must maintain our progress in supporting and growing the healthcare workforce. HB 6901, legislation to create a student-loan forgiveness program for nurses, among other professionals, could play an important role in retaining a skilled healthcare workforce. Respectfully, we suggest that the program parameters should be broadened to include graduates of non-state Connecticut colleges, expand the list of healthcare professionals eligible for the loan repayment program, and consider increasing the maximum adjusted gross income outlined in the bill. Additionally, while we support active volunteerism in our state, we do not think, in this instance, it should be a requirement for participating in the loan repayment program.

As the Committee and General Assembly consider additional ways to support the healthcare workforce, we request your consideration of direct assistance to hospitals in relative size and similar to the \$350 million that was provided to hospitals in Massachusetts to support hospital financial health. As hospitals confront significant financial headwinds, exacerbated by the need to hire temporary, contract labor, a partnership with the state to support the workforce is now more important than ever.

CHA asks the Committee to consider additional assistance through the provision of direct funding to hospitals and health systems for recruitment, retention, and training for healthcare workers and for relief from the increased cost of contract labor and crucial staffing premium pay.

- Healthcare recruitment, retention, and training programming should include, but not be limited to, cash recruitment bonuses, student loan payment assistance, cash retention bonuses, tuition assistance, workplace violence prevention, and other forms of training programming
- Funds should be available to defray the increased costs of contract labor and crucial staffing premium pay

We look forward to continuing to work together to support our state's healthcare workforce and expand it for the future.

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