

**TESTIMONY OF
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BEFORE THE
HIGHER EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT ADVANCEMENT COMMITTEE
Thursday, February 15, 2007**

Good afternoon Senator Hartley, Representative Willis, and members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. I am Liz Beaudin, Director of Nursing and Workforce Initiatives for the Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) and I appreciate the opportunity to testify on behalf of CHA and its members in support of **HB 7102, An Act Adopting The Recommendations Of The Connecticut Allied Health Workforce Policy Board, SB 799, An Act Concerning A Nursing Faculty Student Loan Program, HB 5627, An Act Providing Funding For Academic Nursing Programs, and HB 6024, An Act Concerning Scholarships And Financial Assistance For Nurses Pursuing Master's Degrees.** The primary focus of my comments will be HB 7102.

HB 7102 calls for the establishment of a faculty scholarship for service program administered by the Department of Higher Education to encourage students to teach in nursing and allied health programs within the state. Students pursuing masters and doctoral degrees that would qualify them to become faculty members would receive grants to cover the costs of tuition, fees and books for each year of enrollment, in exchange for a period of service within programs of nursing and allied health as determined by the Department of Higher Education

HB 7102 also calls for the Department of Higher Education, in collaboration with the Office of Workforce Competitiveness and the Department of Labor, to conduct a state-wide marketing campaign, supported by the allocation of three hundred fifty thousand dollars for each budget year, to raise public awareness of allied health programs and healthcare careers in the state.

We believe that taking action now to address the growing and projected severe shortage of nurses and other healthcare professionals in Connecticut is imperative. Connecticut is expected to experience one of the worst nursing shortages in the nation, with a shortfall of registered nurses projected by the Health and Human Services Administration (HRSA) as high as 22,400 by the year 2020. Although recent studies have suggested that shortage projections on a national level may be less acute than originally thought, experts agree that they are nonetheless daunting given rising demand, the aging of the current healthcare workforce, and the ability to provide adequate healthcare for the public. It is not surprising that Connecticut is facing a serious deficit of nurses as it has one of the oldest populations in the U.S. and will experience a significant and growing demand for healthcare services. At the same time, large numbers of nurses will be retirement age and healthcare institutions will have a comparatively small pool of individuals from which to draw replacements.

As the healthcare safety net for Connecticut's citizens, hospitals are particularly concerned with the alarming growing and projected shortage of nurses and other healthcare professionals. While hospitals have had success in holding vacancy rates at manageable levels for the past few years through increased salaries and aggressive recruitment and retention programs, the many factors driving the severe shortages, including rising demand, demographic shifts, and lack of educational capacity are taking hold. Similar to other states in the nation, staffing shortages are a current contributor to the emergency overcrowding problem in Connecticut. As discussed in a recent CHA presentation to the Emergency Department Overcrowding Task Force, shortages of critical care and medical surgical registered nurses, as well as some allied health professionals, are affecting hospitals' ability to transfer admitted patients from the emergency department to inpatient beds on a timely basis, exacerbating an already serious problem. A copy of the presentation is attached to this testimony for your information.

The passage of HB 7102 would begin the process of addressing healthcare workforce shortages through focus on some critical areas, including barriers that exist for maintenance and expansion of enrollment in nursing and allied health programs, lack of awareness of the opportunities for careers in allied health, and the need for student support services to improve retention in some programs.

National initiatives to create awareness regarding the nursing shortage generated significant interest in careers in nursing. However, thousands of qualified applicants are being turned away from schools of nursing each year primarily because of lack of adequate numbers of faculty to teach them. The National League for Nursing reported that 147,000 qualified applicants were turned away from nursing schools in the U.S. in 2005. Over 2,000 qualified applicants in Connecticut were unable to enter nursing programs during the years 2004 and 2005, according to the Connecticut League for Nursing, due to lack of faculty and other resources. The scholarship for service provision of HB 7102 encourages individuals to become faculty members in schools of nursing and allied health to remove this barrier to educating healthcare professionals for the future.

The aging workforce and growing demand for healthcare will lead to shortages in healthcare careers such as respiratory care, radiologic technology, physical therapy, and many others, but these careers have received minimal attention. The lack of public awareness of these healthcare careers is problematic on many fronts, including the growing need for individuals in these areas of expertise to provide care for the state's citizens, and the missed opportunities for individuals in Connecticut to engage in excellent and rewarding careers. The provision offered in HB 7102 for a statewide marketing campaign to raise public awareness of various allied health programs and careers is an important and practical step to improving Connecticut's employment and health.

In addition to removing barriers to enrollment and education of healthcare professionals, and increasing awareness and recruitment of students to the field, providing support to

students that have entered programs to help them to succeed is another positive means toward curbing healthcare workforce shortages included in HB 7102.

SB 799, An Act Concerning A Nursing Faculty Student Loan Program, and HB 6024, An Act Concerning Scholarships And Financial Assistance For Nurses Pursuing Master's Degrees are focused on encouraging faculty development for schools of nursing in the state through the provision of loan forgiveness and scholarships. CHA supports such initiatives that will serve to reduce barriers to educating the future nursing workforce and address the growing shortage of nurses in Connecticut.

HB 5627, An Act Providing Funding For Academic Nursing Programs, calls for increased investment in Connecticut's schools of nursing. While nursing programs in Connecticut are currently operating at near maximum capacity, they will need financial support to sustain this level of operation and to further expand where possible. Again, CHA supports initiatives that will address the need for nurses and help to ensure that there is adequate healthcare for the citizens of Connecticut.

To avert a crisis in care for the people of Connecticut, the state must initiate a multi-year, substantively funded effort to address healthcare workforce shortages now. Passage of this legislation will provide for important, practical interventions and afford a variety of benefits to the state, including support of higher education and workforce development for Connecticut's citizens, and protection of the public's health.

Thank you for consideration of our position.

For additional information, contact CHA Government Relations at (203) 294-7310.