



**TESTIMONY
OF THE
CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
SELECT COMMITTEE ON WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

Tuesday, February 26, 2002

HB 5421, An Act Concerning Connecticut Career Choices Programs

CHA appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony in support of **HB 5421, An Act Concerning Connecticut Career Choices Programs**. HB 5421 creates a durational special electives permit to allow professionals to teach elective courses in workforce shortage areas to juniors and seniors attending public schools in Connecticut.

As you have heard in several previous hearings on the healthcare workforce shortage, Connecticut's hospitals are facing a serious workforce shortage that is growing at an accelerating and alarming rate. Our statewide nurse vacancy rate has more than tripled since 1997. Our critical care areas and certain other specialty areas have been particularly hard-hit. Today, Connecticut's acute care hospitals alone are seeking to hire over a thousand more nurses to fill current vacancies.

While much of the available healthcare workforce shortage data focuses on nurses, this isn't just a nursing issue for Connecticut hospitals. Our hospitals are experiencing significant shortages in several other key areas, including:

- pharmacy (the short supply of pharmacists has not only affected hospitals; retail pharmacies across the state have reduced their hours and service),
- diagnostic imaging (hospitals are losing valuable, trained radiologic technologists, ultrasonographers, EEG technicians and mammography techs to physician practices and other care centers),
- operating rooms (in addition to the lack of experienced OR nurses, hospitals are facing shortages of surgical technologists),
- laboratory staff (our labs are chronically short of medical technologists and technicians as many are seeking employment in the expanding bioscience area)
- and now hospitals are developing shortages in respiratory therapy, physical therapy and occupational therapy.

There are many initiatives to address the workforce shortage underway in all these areas in Connecticut and we look forward to more. Initiatives include school partnership and mentoring programs.

We know we need an extensive, broad-based marketing effort to recruit a new generation of healthcare workers. We need to aggressively promote nursing and the broad range of other healthcare professions as the exciting, flexible, mobile, satisfying and rewarding careers they can be.

We need to promote diversity in our candidates and in our workforce. We need effective outreach efforts to underserved and undertapped populations. We need to reach students and their parents early - beginning at the elementary level - with information about health science and health careers. HB 5421 will help to accomplish these goals.

HB 5421 will be another method to encourage students to enter health care professions by allowing professionals to teach elective courses in areas of their expertise thus bringing practical knowledge and experience into the classroom. This bill will also address a growing problem related to the healthcare workforce shortage: the ever increasing shortage of healthcare educators.

CHA looks forward to working with the Department of Labor and the Office of Workforce Competitiveness to implement the provisions of this legislation.

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