

**JOINT TESTIMONY
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 below signed organizations appreciate this opportunity to submit testimony concerning **SB 251, An Act Expanding Training Programs For Careers In Health Care.**

We support the legislation, suggest strengthening its provisions, and encourage broader action to support the development and retention of the healthcare workforce.

Since early 2020, Connecticut's healthcare workforce has been at the center of our state's response to the COVID-19 public health emergency. But two years of COVID-19 response have left the workforce experiencing burnout, with some considering early retirement and others simply leaving healthcare altogether. Shortages that have been building in healthcare professions for years are now critical, most acute in nursing, but felt across disciplines. 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.

Connecticut's healthcare providers across the continuum of care are experiencing a severe workforce shortage. High vacancy rates and employee turnover are driving labor costs up, taking the cost of care in the wrong direction.

Healthcare providers are working hard to retain the current workforce and recruit additional staff—providing financial incentives, identifying opportunities for career advancement, and supporting continuing education in the short-term. Over the long-term, partnerships with colleges and technical schools are being strengthened 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 appreciate the Committee's focus on the current challenges of the healthcare workforce. Several of the undersigned group have submitted individual testimonies that focus on specific changes to SB 251.

Jointly, we encourage the Committee to consider broader and more aggressive action to confront the healthcare workforce shortage.

We are supportive of the provisions in the Governor’s budget which proposes to invest \$35 million in expanding the number of education and training opportunities for aspiring nurses and mental health providers, \$20 million in financial aid for students pursuing a nursing or mental health career pathway degree, and \$17 million in a student loan-forgiveness program for clinicians that work in underserved communities.

However, 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.

In order to enact such a program in Connecticut, we outline our strategy below. Of note, to accomplish these goals, public *and* private institutions of higher education must be considered part of the solution.

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 employment in healthcare
- 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.

Association of Connecticut Ambulance Providers
Community Medical Group
Connecticut Academy of PAs
Connecticut Assisted Living Association
Connecticut Association for Healthcare at Home
Connecticut Association of Ambulatory Surgery Centers
Connecticut Association of Marriage and Family Therapists
Connecticut Association of Health Care Facilities
Connecticut Center for Assisted Living
Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges
Connecticut Counseling Association
Community Health Center, Inc.
Community Health Center Association of CT
Connecticut Hospital Association
Connecticut Psychological Association
Connecticut Society for Respiratory Care
Connecticut State Medical Society
LeadingAge Connecticut
Radiological Society of Connecticut
Radiological Technologists
Yale University