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**TESTIMONY RE: R. B. No. 7035 AN ACT CONCERNING ERGONOMICS AND
WORKPLACE SAFETY.**

LABOR AND PUBLIC EMPLOYEES COMMITTEE

February 27, 2007

TO: Senator Prague, Representative Ryan and members of the Labor and
Employees Committee.

FROM: Mary Jane Williams, RN, PhD, chairperson, Government Relations
Committee

Thank-you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Nurses' Association (CNA), the professional organization for registered nurses in Connecticut. I am past-president of the Connecticut Nurses' Association, current chairperson of its Government Relations Committee and professor of nursing at the University of Hartford. I have practiced nursing for over 40 years and have been educating nurses in Connecticut for 35 years. I am providing comments in support of RAISED BILL NO. 7035, AN ACT CONCERNING ERGONOMICS AND WORKIPLACE SAFETY.

Connecticut Nurses' Association supports this bill for the following reasons:

- **Home health agencies, hospitals and long term care facilities have begun to establish safe patient handling programs**
 - A number of Connecticut's home health agencies, hospitals, and long term care facilities have already instituted safe patient handling programs and pilot projects. These can serve as models for other organizations.
- **Smart Moves campaign recently developed by coalition of provider organizations**
 - A coalition of representative provider organizations (CT Association of Health Care Facilities/CAHCF, CT Association for Home Care/CAHC, CT Hospital Association/CHA, CT Association of Not-for-Profit Providers for the

Aging /CANPFA, CT Nurses' Association/CNA, have recently developed a statewide safe patient handling campaign, Smart Moves, to improve the health and safety of nurses and other healthcare workers, increase patient safety, and reduce healthcare costs.

- **The most current research** conducted by Dr. Audrey Nelson and her colleagues at the Tampa Veterans System support the concept of "SAFE HANDLING" based on the outcomes of research conducted related to handling. Dr. Nelson's research is the first that has ever been done using patients and related to lifting and handling since the studies conducted in 1952.
- **High rates of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) for nurses/nursing personnel**
 - Efforts related to the American Nurses Association's "Safe Patient Handling" campaign have brought more needed attention to the recognition that manual patient handling is a very high-hazard task. The incidence of musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) continues to persist at very high rates for nurses and other nursing personnel.
 - Nursing personnel are among the highest at risk for MSDs with nursing aides, orderlies and attendants ranked first (Bureau of Labor Statistics) and RNs sixth listed in at-risk occupations for sprains and strains.
- **Back injuries complicate the growing nursing shortage**
 - Studies of back-related worker's compensation claims reveal that nursing personnel have the highest claim rates of any occupation or industry. This is of particular concern when it's noted that an estimated 12% of nurses leave the profession annually due to back injuries and more than 52% complain of chronic back pain.
 - Injuries that are secondary to patient handling are compounding factors with the aging of the nursing workforce, declining retention and recruitment rates and even the lowering of the social value of nursing.
- **Federal OSHA (3/03) released its "Guidelines for Nursing Homes - Ergonomics for the Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders**
 - In these "Guidelines," OSHA recommends that "manual lifting of patients be minimized in all cases and eliminated when feasible." Although a "guideline,"

not a regulation, it clearly reflects the recognition that manual patient handling is an extremely high-risk job task.

This bill, which requires employers (including health care organizations) to develop a written ergonomics policy through their health and safety committees and programs, is an additional step in making health care workplaces safer for nurses, their colleagues and the patients that they care for.

Thank you.

Facts, resources and references are available at www.nursingworld.org/handlewithcare/

