

TESTIMONY
HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE

February 19, 2009

Good afternoon Senator Hanley, Representative Willis and members of the Committee. I am Sharon Palmer, President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse 28,000 member union. Our membership includes nurses and health professionals working in Connecticut public and private acute care hospitals. I am here today to speak on proposed H.B. 5613 regarding nurse faculty.

The shortage of nurses in this country is well documented. The federal government estimates there will be one million fewer than needed by 2020. But even the best recruitment strategies will be ineffective if there are insufficient faculty to teach potential nurses.

The AFT's Nurse Faculty Task Force has developed a series of recommendations regarding nurse faculty and I would like to share some highlights with you:

- 1. Create a work environment that is conducive to recruiting new nursing faculty and retaining those nurse educators already in the profession.**
 - Increase nursing faculty salaries through the collective bargaining process.

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- Create a workplace culture within schools of nursing to mentor new faculty. Incentives (financial, reduced workload, etc.) should be provided to mentors and mentoring should become an accepted part of the faculty role.
- Support existing faculty and encourage new faculty with incentives such as reimbursement for conferences, continuing education and release time for professional activities.
- Provide professional development activities and resources to all nursing faculty.
- Provide time in a normal workload schedule for research.
- Make teaching assistants and stipends available for nursing faculty support.

2. Increase the amount of public and private money available to properly fund nursing programs and provide for the expansion of nursing education programs while also working to improve the image of the profession.

- Negotiate with hospitals and other clinical agencies to provide financial resources to nursing schools for fiscal and personnel resources.
- Increase state funding for nursing education programs, including monies earmarked for faculty education,

professional development and other resources to support nursing education programs.

- Seek opportunities to improve the public image of nursing and nursing education.

3. Develop and implement updated and nontraditional methods of instruction to prepare future nursing instructors.

- Explore new models of teaching nursing students in light of the complexities in today's healthcare infrastructure.
- Investigate various ways to deliver clinical skills education including clinical simulation.
- Study existing nontraditional programs to determine their success, lessons learned and potential use as models for future programs to educate future nurse educators.
- Promote postgraduate study and nursing education as a desirable career choice early in a nurse's education.

4. Utilize faculty and facilities in a collaborative manner consistent with quality nursing education, academic independence of nursing institutions and the best use of faculty time.

- Increase formal partnerships between schools of nursing and clinical facilities, identifying and capitalizing on

specific benefits that are attractive and useful to both partners.

- Explore collaborative use of resources between schools of nursing to ensure nursing schools have fiscal resources available for faculty.
- Create roles for retired nursing faculty, utilizing their skills and expertise, in support of current faculty.

We would suggest that Connecticut needs to form its own nurse faculty task force and would like to work with you on this initiative. We have no time to waste as the need for nurses increases with the demographics of our aging population.

Thank you for your time and attention to this important matter.