



377 Research Parkway
Meriden, CT 06450-7160
203-238-1207

**TESTIMONY RE: RB 6336 AN ACT CONCERNING NURSES PURSUING
ADVANCED DEGREES**

Committee on Higher Education and Employment Hearing

Good morning Senator Handley, Representative Willis and members of the Committee on Higher Education and Employment.

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 Dr. Mary Jane Williams, current chairperson of its Government Relations Committee and professor and chair of nursing at the University of Hartford. I have practiced nursing for over 40 years and have been educating nurses in Connecticut in both the public and private sector for over 35 years.

The nursing shortage in Connecticut is projected to be among the worst in the nation. Currently we appear to be in the "eye of the storm." The down turn in the economy has forced many individuals to continue to work, work settings are not hiring at the rate anticipated due to their own economic constraints and the entire workforce is aging as is the population. If we do not recognize the causes of lull in the storm and do not continue to address the Allied Health Care Workforce shortage we will be headed toward the "perfect storm" in health care. The age of our nurses, coupled with the growing demand for providers, will come as we experience a huge decrease in nurses and faculty due to retirement.

The major factor contributing to the nursing workforce shortage is the shortage of faculty. The facts about the nursing faculty shortage are well documented. Faculty is aging. It is

estimated that 75% of the current faculty population is expected to retire by 2019. All educational settings are filling positions with part time faculty; this has the potential of having a negative effect on the program and the employee. Part time employees may not be invested in the total work of the program and the employee may not be paid for the value they bring to the educational setting. It is also a growing problem because nursing faculty are not prepared at the Doctoral Level. Only 350 to 400 nursing students receive doctoral degrees each year and the pool of candidates for full time positions is limited. This lack of qualified faculty impacts the credibility of nursing within the university setting and limits those individuals who are prepared for leadership roles and /or compete for research funding (NLN, 2005).

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing reports that nursing schools nationally are struggling to fill positions. The average age of doctorally prepared nursing faculty by rank was 59.1 years for professors, 56.1 years for associate professors and 51.7 years for assistant professors. Faculty does not reflect the demographics of the population. Only 11.5 % are underrepresented groups and 5.7 are males. In its most recent survey AACN found 45.1% of all faculty are doctorally prepared.

The major reasons, most critical reasons for not hiring faculty are reported to be 1) inability to recruit qualified faculty 2) limited pool of doctorally prepared faculty and 3) lack of educational experience.

We as responsible citizens need to recognize the potential impact a severe shortage of workforce providers will have on the quality of care provided across all settings and ultimately on the health of the public. We need to put what few resources we have into the systems that will give us the best and most rapid return as we try to grow our nursing workforce. We must stop turning qualified students away from programs; we must mobilize our nurses in an attempt to prepare them for leadership positions within academic settings, it is the right initiative for the state.

Therefore we recommend;

- 1). Continued funding of programs that provide mobility for nurses.
- 2). Support of doctoral education as we attempt to prepare faculty for university teaching positions.
- 3) Continued Support of the Allied Health Policy Workforce Board.

Thank you,

Mary Jane M. Williams PhD, RN