CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION

TESTIMONY OF
CONNECTICUT HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION
SUBMITTED TO THE
PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE
Monday, March 16, 2009

HB 6674, An Act Concerning Workforce Development And Improved Access To Health Care Services

The Connecticut Hospital Association (CHA) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony in support of section 1 of **HB 6674, An Act Concerning Workforce Development And Improved Access To Health Care Services**.

It is essential that Connecticut pay close attention to ensuring that there will be an adequate healthcare workforce to meet the needs of the citizens of the state. As the state with the eighth oldest population, Connecticut's demand for healthcare is high and expected to balloon as the baby boomer generation ages. Among the baby boomers retiring over the next decade will be nurses and allied healthcare workers; without attention to workforce development, there will not be sufficient resources to replace them.

Complicating healthcare workforce development initiatives is the fact that there are not adequate numbers of qualified faculty members to prepare the state's healthcare workforce. Such positions tend to require individuals with strong math and science backgrounds who are educated at the masters and doctoral levels. While a large contingent of healthcare workers are due to retire soon, the faculty members who would prepare their replacements will be retiring even earlier, as their average age is generally older than those in practice. Thus, initiatives that support practitioners in pursuit of advanced degrees are timely and necessary.

There is a danger that current economic forces may cause the state to lose sight of a very serious impending crisis: the potential failure to meet the healthcare needs of its citizens due to a severe shortage of healthcare workers. Connecticut is projected to have one of the worst nursing shortages in the nation by the year 2020, and there are national shortages projected in numerous other healthcare professions. Although healthcare workers may now be delaying retirement, they will inevitably leave the workforce in large numbers and an educated and competent workforce will need to follow in their footsteps.

Continued vigilance and planning are critical to address Connecticut's healthcare workforce shortages. We appreciate this proposed legislation, as it serves to keep the issue at the forefront. We suggest that development of the initiative proposed in **HB 6674** build upon the work carried out thus far by the Allied Health Workforce Policy Board and include consideration of approaches such as scholarship for service programs, tuition waivers, and loan programs to assist individuals to prepare to become part of the healthcare workforce.

To accomplish this, we respectfully request you amend subsection (a) of section 1 as follows:

> (a) The Department of Public Health, in collaboration with the Department of Higher Education, the Labor Department, the Office of Workforce Competitiveness, The University of Connecticut, The University of Connecticut School of Medicine, The University of Connecticut School of Dentistry, the Connecticut State University System and the Community-Technical Colleges, shall develop an initiative to address the state's health care workforce shortage. Such initiative shall seek to increase the number of health care workers in the state through the offering of expanded and enhanced educational programs at public institutions of higher education. The program shall include, but not be limited to, the following: (1) Expansion of existing health care related academic programs to promote increased enrollment and retention of students in such programs; (2) development of alternative academic programs that are designed to assimilate displaced workers and other individuals who seek to make a career change into the health care workforce; (3) recruitment and retention of underserved populations into the health care workforce; (4) development of distance learning initiatives**; (5) development of scholarship for service programs, tuition waivers, and loan programs to assist individuals to prepare to become part of the health care workforce; and [(5)] (6)** development of on-the-job training initiatives that are designed to provide valuable work experience to those receiving the training and assist in alleviating health care workforce shortages, particularly in areas of the state with underserved populations.

Thank you for your consideration of our position.

For additional information, contact CHA Government Relations at (203) 294-7310.