



TESTIMONY

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Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee
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Good afternoon Senator Handley and Representative Willis and distinguished members of the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee. I am Dr. Linda K. Rinker, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Western Connecticut State University (WCSU) and I am here on behalf of President James Schmotter. I am testifying today in support of Bill No. 6336, *An Act Concerning Nurses Pursuing Advanced Degrees*.

As you are aware, the United States and Connecticut is challenged by a shortage of registered nurses, and an ever growing deficit of nursing faculty (AACN, 2005). To address the need for more registered nurses, nursing programs nationwide have increased their enrollments (AACN, 2005). However, nursing programs cannot continue to expand capacity without an adequate number of more educators to teach future nurses.

Since 1998, the United States has been facing a critical shortage of registered nurses (Buerhaus, 2005). The shortage is expected to persist well into the next decade despite national efforts to grow the nursing workforce (AACN, 2008a). An analysis of state-level supply and demand of registered nurses indicates that Connecticut will have a shortfall of about 22,000 by 2020 (HRSA, 2004). Factors such as salary increases, national unemployment rates, and national efforts to increase the nursing workforce, have had a positive impact on the number of practicing RNs. However, experts note that "there is no empirical evidence that the nurse shortage has ended" (Buerhaus, Staiger, and Auerbach, 2004).

Experts base their conclusion partly on the fact that most of the growth to date has come from RNs (50-64 years of age) who have reentered the workforce. The influx of these reentry RNs has provided some welcomed relief to the significant RN shortage faced by healthcare institutions.

However, the nursing shortage problem will not be solved by this new cadre of nurses because, given their age, they will soon be retiring and leaving the workforce again. Although there has been an increase in the number of younger nurses (under 35 years of age) as well, the growth noted from 2001-2004 (about 90,000 new RNs) does not match the projected long term need of about 2.8 million FTE nurses by 2020 (Buerhaus, Staiger, & Auerbach, 2004). Unless a greater number of younger individuals begin to enter the profession each year, the nursing shortage is expected to persist for some time.

Over the past several years, nursing education programs have responded to the critical demand for more registered nurses by expanding enrollments and increasing the number of new nurse graduates (AACN, 2008a). Nursing education programs in Connecticut, and particularly two programs in the CSU System: Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU) and WCSU, responded to the call for more RNs by increasing enrollments in existing programs and/or creating new program options to attract non-traditional or second degree students to nursing (e.g. SCSU developed an Accelerated Career Entry-ACE program). However, creative efforts to expand enrollments in nursing programs are now being challenged by a new and growing crisis in the profession: the nurse faculty shortage (AACN, 2008b).

Due to the lack of qualified nurse faculty, nursing education programs have been forced to deny admission to a growing number of qualified applicants at a time when there is a dire need for more registered nurses (AACN, 2008a). The National League for Nursing (NLN), the organization that collects and disseminates information on all types of nursing education programs reported that 88,000 qualified applicants were turned away due to a lack of faculty (NLN, 2006). Similarly, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), the organization that represents baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs, reported that U.S. nursing schools denied admission to about 40,825 qualified applicants in 2007. About 70% of the programs responding to the survey reported that a lack of qualified faculty was the reason for denying admission to applicants.

A similar trend has been observed in Connecticut. In fact, data from the Connecticut League for Nursing (CLN, 2005, updated 2008) indicate that this is a growing problem. Nursing programs expanded their enrollments by 5% from 2006 to 2007. However, there was a 6% increase in the number of qualified applicants who were denied admission as well.

With additional faculty resources, a greater number of qualified applicants could be admitted to CT's nursing programs. However, the growing nurse faculty shortage precludes nursing programs from further expanding their enrollments.

A survey conducted in Connecticut reveals a similar disturbing trend with respect to the nurse faculty workforce (CLN, 2005, updated 2008). Programs with baccalaureate and graduate programs in nursing reported employing a total of 150 faculty members. Of those, 72% on average are doctorally prepared. Only two programs reported that 100% of their faculty are doctorally prepared. Associate degree and diploma programs report having a total of 89 faculty members, 17% of whom are doctorally prepared. Like the national population of nurse faculty, a significant percentage of CT's nursing faculty are approaching retirement age. In fact, an average of about 15% of faculty across all programs are expected to retire within the next 3 to 5 years.

Without quick intervention, the nurse faculty shortage will threaten the future of nursing education and ultimately, the future of the nursing profession. In recognition of the pressing need to prepare more nurses to assume faculty roles, a joint Ed.D. program in Nursing Education is proposed by WCSU and SCSU who have a successful track record of preparing nurses for entry level and advanced roles. The program will build on CSUS's long standing tradition of excellence in preparing educators and nurses. In addition, faculty in related disciplines (e.g. education, business) will be invited to contribute their expertise and talents to create a unique and innovative program that will prepare qualified nurses to advanced in or embark on successful careers as nurse educators.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today and I would be happy to answer any questions that you have at this time.