

State Vocational Federation of Teachers

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Testimony of Julie Marzano, RN, BSN MSed

Appropriations Committee
February 16, 2010

RE: Restoration of the Connecticut Technical High Schools' Adult Education Licensed Practical Nursing Program

Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this evening about the suspension and potential restoration of the Licensed Practical Nursing Program. My name is Julie Marzano. I am a Master's-prepared Registered Nurse and taught for twelve years at Kaynor Technical High School. I am here on behalf of the state run Licensed Practical Nursing Programs, the thousands of potential applicants who desperately are pursuing entrance into the program, as well as the citizens of Connecticut – especially the elderly – who rely daily on nursing care for survival.

In my twenty-one years as a registered nurse, I have witnessed changes in nursing that have been prompted by insurance and healthcare changes; an aging population struggling with co-morbidities; and a severe, increasing, well-documented nursing shortage. These problems have only made the profession of nursing more difficult. However, even with its tribulations, I have learned that I love nursing and even more, I love teaching nursing. I became privileged to teach as a Licensed Practical Nurse Instructor. Although I never thought it possible, my experience teaching has shaped who I am as a nurse and made me love nursing even more. My time teaching at Kaynor has provided a vehicle to teach the true art of nursing, which is not only taking care of the physical needs of the infirmed, but truly caring for the most vulnerable people. I always teach my students that it is an intimate privilege to touch another human the way a nurse must in order to provide quality care.

I have had the opportunity to witness many incredible stories of students who have wanted to become nurses, but for many reasons have been held back. The top three reasons are as follows: First, the backlog at the RN programs is astounding; there are not enough nurse educators to educate the wait-listed students. The next reason is timing. Parents wait for their children to be school-aged to begin their education. The CT Technical School System program accommodates them through our school-year based calendar, allowing them to be in school at the same time as their children. The last reason is financial. Many students can afford our tuition which is comparable to the Community Colleges, but we have already established they cannot always get into those programs; they simply cannot afford the tuition at the private LPN schools which hovers in the high twenty to mid-thirty thousand dollar ranges. Our programs have been affordable to many, including those on state assistance.

I have seen countless students graduate from our programs and become successful. They are rooted in Connecticut with their families; they stay, live and work here, and immediately upon graduation, they pay the taxes this state desperately needs. As an LPN, the average starting salary is \$20.00-\$26.00/hour. Two years ago, an articulation model was formulated specifically with our program and the State Community Colleges, not the private LPN schools, which allows many of our students to articulate into an RN program which not only increases their opportunities, and their salaries, but helps alleviate the RN shortage as well. I have witnessed one of my LPN graduates further her education and become a supervisor of Lincare Oxygen Company, increasing her salary to \$65,000/year. Another student obtained her BSN, did her student teaching with us, and is looking for a nurse educator job. Yet another has gone on to get her advanced degrees and become the Assistant Director of Nurses at a local nursing home making a far higher salary than the LPN's working for her.

Since the program was suspended last month, my colleagues and I have been transferred to positions at other agencies. During our meetings with the Office of Labor Relations, we were told multiple times, if not for us, these positions were not going to be refilled. As a result of the concession agreement state employees negotiated with the Governor last year, most of my colleagues and I are earning significantly more than we were as LPN Instructors. Although we are grateful for our current employment, the cost to the state seems outrageous, and as a taxpayer, I have a hard time accepting that. I just want to return to teaching those students who are looking to change their own lives by helping others.

I am grateful that Senator Williams and Senator Harris have formed a work group to help restore the LPN Program. I am thankful for the program restoration bills introduced by Senator Prague and Representative O'Brien. I am grateful to Senator Gaffey and Representative Fleischman for giving the teachers a forum to be heard with regards to some of the issues facing the Connecticut Technical High School System. I appreciate Commissioner McQuillan and Superintendent Ciccone being open to some potential ways to restore the program as well, one which might be a slight tuition increase, but am sympathetic to the charge at hand. We as a group of nurse educators believe in the need for this program, and we remain hopeful.

Thank you.