



February 9, 2010

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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 5024, "An Act Concerning and Educational Doctoral Degree Program in Nursing Education" which would allow the Connecticut State University System (CSUS) to offer an Ed.D. degree in nursing education. For the record, I am Sue Fitzsimons, PhD, RN, Senior Vice President for Patient Services at Yale-New Haven Hospital. I strongly support the Connecticut State University System's (CSUS) proposed Ed.D. in Nursing Education that would be offered collaboratively by Southern Connecticut State University and Western Connecticut State University.

Yale New Haven Hospital is a 911-bed tertiary referral medical center which is nationally and internationally recognized for its high quality medical care and commitment to teaching and clinical research. As a medical center that is ranked regularly among the nation's best hospitals, Yale New Haven relies heavily on a well educated and highly skilled registered nurse workforce to deliver safe and competent patient care.

The current and projected shortage of registered nurses and nursing faculty threatens the ability of medical centers, such as Yale New Haven, to continue to provide excellent healthcare. According to data from the U.S. Bureau of Health Professions, Connecticut is projected to have the second worst nursing shortage in the country by 2020 with a shortfall of about 22,000 registered nurses. Although hospitals across the state and nation are currently reporting lower vacancy rates, experts warn that these current rates can be deceiving and may lead some to falsely believe that the nursing shortage is coming to end. In reality, the current economic recession has had a significant impact on vacancy and turnover rates. Seasoned registered nurses have increased their hours or delayed their retirement until the economic picture improves, contributing to a decreased demand for new graduate nurses. This is only temporary. We need to address the long term healthcare needs of our state.

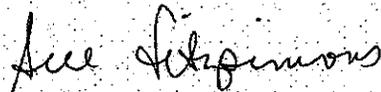
While the state's nursing programs have produced more registered nurses over the past several years by expanding enrollments, the number is not nearly enough to address the projected long term need. The growing nurse faculty shortage is now precluding further expansion. Like the registered nurse population, the average age of doctorally-prepared nurse faculty is steadily rising and is estimated to be about 55 years of age. Long-term strategies to address both the registered nurse and nurse faculty shortage must be implemented.

The proposed Ed.D. in Nursing Education from the CSUS offers an innovative solution that will help to grow the pipeline of registered nurses and nurse faculty. In addition, the CSUS is proposing a fiscally responsible strategy to address this complex issue by maximizing existing resources of two of its universities that have a track record of preparing registered nurses for entry level and advanced roles.

Graduates of this program not only will be able to teach in two-year and four-year nursing programs, but also will be able to teach in graduate nursing education programs to prepare future faculty, thereby continuously replenishing the supply of registered nurses and nurse faculty.

I urge you to give full support for this important initiative and thank you for your leadership in addressing the State's nursing workforce needs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sue Fitzsimons".

Sue Fitzsimons, PhD, RN
Senior VP, Patient Services