

# State Vocational Federation of Teachers

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## Testimony of Julie Marzano, Former LPN Instructor State Vocational Federation of Teachers Labor and Public Employees Committee February 25, 2010

### **Re: Support for the States Vocational Licensed Practical Nursing Program and Opposition to suspension of the Licensed Practical Nursing Program**

Dear Senator Prague, Representative Ryan, and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the suspension and potential restoration of the Licensed Practical Nursing Program. My name is Julie Marzano. I am a Masters-prepared Registered Nurse and taught at Kaynor for twelve years. 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 comorbidities and a severe, increasing, well-documented nursing shortage. This nursing shortage is only projected to get worse. The state run LPN programs served a dual purpose for the state. The programs were making a difference in the nursing shortage as well as providing an economical avenue for people in our state to become employed with gainful, steady, long-term employment. At this time, I realize our state is in dire financial straits, hence the closing of the programs. However, I feel as these programs are a necessary component in revitalizing Connecticut's economy.

Since the closing of the programs, the instructors have been placed in various jobs within state agencies. Not only were we placed in different jobs, as many of you are aware, we were placed there at significantly higher salaries. The day we were given our job opportunities, we were told by Linda Yalmeni that these were jobs that were not going to be filled within the state. This statement has not only been reinforced by the fact that many of us are working in jobs that do not yet have job titles, written job descriptions, nor supervisors who know how to use our experience effectively. There are job descriptions that are evolving as we go. This leaves a lot of state educated nurses not being able to utilize their nursing educator skills or for that matter, their nursing skills. It is true that the shortage of nurses directly relates to the shortage of nurse educators. By not running these nursing programs, the state then is hindering the current nursing

shortage in 2 ways; by not using nurse educators in jobs that directly did not reflect the shortage and by not using them to educate approximately 400 new nurses every 18 months. Also the waitlist for students to get into nursing programs is exceptionally long. Many of the students who applied to Community College RN programs used the LPN programs as a back-up plan. Two years ago, we articulated our curriculum with those colleges, allowing our students to receive approximately 30 college credits toward their RN degree. This articulation process made bridging into the RN programs much easier for our students if they desired. The private LPN programs do not offer this opportunity to their students, not to mention the outrageous fees charged by the private programs. For these two reasons alone, as well as many others, this made the state run LPN programs the programs of choice for many. This was well evidenced by the 1100 applicants we had to the programs for the class that was to begin in January. These applicants were extremely disappointed by the decision to suspend the LPN program. I believe that many of them are waiting out this period in hopes of the program being restored.

Currently I am aware of the bills being issued for the restoration of the program. The programs may need some revisions in the area of tuition adjustment and consolidation. I believe that these are areas that can be successfully managed without taking away from the program itself. Many other changes would have to be approved by the State Board of Nurse Examiners and may alter the program as a whole. Therefore, it is respectfully requested that any changes discussed are done so with the input of members of the programs, perhaps Department Heads, who know the program inside out and may be able to provide valuable insight to issues discussed. The program as it was had historical success, sixty plus years. It provided students with an exceptional foundation that cannot be found elsewhere. The state programs have the community support, expertise and experience which by far provides students with the premiere LPN education in the state. It is crucial for the ongoing success of our program that we continue to be able to provide that.

Based on that statement, I would like to sum up my remarks. The expertise and experience of the state instructors can be seen by the years of service they have committed to this program. This is best illustrated in the seniority lists and pay scales that have been circulated. These are committed nursing educators who are paid for their experience and expertise. When we were moved to 12-month jobs with a longer work day, we received significant increases in our yearly pay. In many cases, the reassignments are jobs that do not need to be performed by a nurse, which does not alleviate the nursing shortage in any way. And although we are grateful for our current employment, the cost to the state seems outrageous. Finally the nursing shortage is only going to continue grow as many of our state nurses are near retirement age. Therefore nursing education should be growing in order to prevent a crisis. The citizens of our state need and want these LPN programs as evidenced by the 600 signatures obtained by 5 hours of time spent at the Brass Mill Center in Waterbury, one afternoon. I believe that shows full community support. We as a group of nurse educators believe in the need for this program and for our students who are waiting, we remain hopeful.

I would like to thank-you for the opportunity to speak to you this evening.

Sincerely,  
Julie Marzano RN, BSN MSed