

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

Testimony prepared by Frances Padilla

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*RB 5362 An Act Targeting State Financial Aid to Support Technical Training and RB 5495 An Act Establishing An Accelerated Certificates Program*

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Good afternoon. My name is Frances Padilla and I am the President of the Universal Health Care Foundation. The Foundation's mission is to serve as a catalyst that engages residents and communities in shaping a health system that provides universal access to quality health care and promotes health in Connecticut. We believe that health care is a fundamental right and that our work is part of a broader movement for social and economic justice. I am testifying today on behalf of the Allied Health Workforce Policy Board for which I serve as co-chair on *RB 5362 An Act Targeting State Financial Aid to Support Technical Training and RB 5495 An Act Establishing An Accelerated Certificates Program*.

The Connecticut Allied Health Workforce Policy Board (AHWPB) was established in Public Act 04-220 (*An Act Concerning Allied Health Workforce Needs*) to conduct research and planning activities related to the allied health workforce. The Board began meeting in March 2005 and issued its first report to the legislature in February 2006. Since 2010, the AHWPB has also served as a subcommittee of the CT Employment and Training Commission providing guidance on healthcare workforce issues.

Throughout its tenure, the Board has met regularly to discuss current initiatives in allied health in the state, gaps in workforce data, issues related to educational programming, and recruitment and retention of the workforce, as well as researching and developing solutions to allied health workforce shortages. In particular, the AHWPB is working hard to track the implications of state and federal reforms and to partner with employers and educators to align programs with hiring and retention requirements.

Through its deliberations, the AHWPB has identified a number of challenges that must be addressed in order to lessen workforce shortages in allied health and nursing. These challenges, highlighted in our annual legislative report which was recently sent to your office, require collaboration and investments among a variety of stakeholders including state agencies, colleges and universities, labor unions and employers. The Raised Bills being heard today could help to address the challenges faced by individuals who are interested in working or advancing in the healthcare workforce.

Many individuals who are interested in the healthcare field start in entry level jobs. The state's nursing homes, hospitals and community care agencies for instance hire many certified nurse aides to care for their patients. Individuals who are interested in this work must pay for their own training at the state's community colleges because the non-credit program is not eligible for federal or state financial aid. RB 5362 would provide an opportunity for financially needy students to pursue this training with support from the state. This training leads to an industry recognized credential and correlates to occupational openings in the state as required by the legislation.

In addition, RB 5495 which would establish accelerated certificates could focus on occupations in demands in the healthcare field such as health information technology which is often training pursued by existing healthcare workers advancing in their careers. It will be important that these accelerated programs are supported by the state financial aid called for in RB 5362 if not eligible for federal grants.

Connecticut possesses many valuable resources and extensive experience in its efforts to prepare the healthcare workforce, including a large number of strong educational institutions and healthcare providers. However, many individuals who could succeed in the healthcare field cannot enter training or advance their training due to financial constraints in paying for non-credit programs.

RB 5362 and 5495 can help to support both individuals interested in pursuing healthcare training and employers looking for qualified staff. I urge your support of both of these bills and the resources necessary to make their promise a reality.

Thank you.