

December 8, 2009

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

Chairmen and Chairwomen and members of the committee,

I would first like to thank you for the opportunity to testify today about the suspension of the Licensed Practical Nursing Program, which I strongly oppose. My name is Rebecca Sirowich; I hold a master's degree in nursing, as do all of my colleagues, and I am here on behalf of the Licensed Practical Nursing Program throughout the state of Connecticut.

For more than 50 years, the state run LPN programs have provided quality instruction and prepared thousands of nurses for the life-or-death tasks upon which Connecticut residents rely. In each class, we have approximately 400 students that are accepted from a pool of 1,120 applicants, who come from throughout our state. We train both men and women, groom them to succeed in their new careers, and ensure that immediately upon graduation our nurses are ready to live in, work for, and become taxpayers of the state of Connecticut. Because of the continued success of the program, our graduates are the preferred hires in many extended care facilities throughout the state, rather than the graduates of private schools.

It is the licensed practical nurse whom we train who are on the front lines of patient care, who are responsible for keeping our parents and grandparents comfortable, and who make sure their personal hygiene is attended to, that they are cleaned and dressed each day, among many other tasks, when misfortune finds them needing the care of others.

I ask you to consider the ramifications of eliminating a program that has the obligation of training people to handle those vital responsibilities.

As we currently stand, there is already a nursing shortage. In 2006, the Connecticut Department of Labor stated that there would be a significant need and numerous job openings for Licensed Practical Nurses until 2016. Due to the aging population of both the nurses and the state, the need for nursing care, as well as nurses, will increase. During a time when unemployment has been rising, it makes no sense to eliminate a program that prepares people for a field that has a need to hire new people.

Additionally, I myself have a brother who suffered from a motorcycle accident five years ago, leaving him paralyzed from the chest down and I am extremely grateful for the care he received. I wonder about the kind of care he would have gotten if those working with him were not sufficiently trained. I wonder about the attention our state's patients will get if there are fewer LPNs, many of whom are already counted on to work night, weekend and holiday hours.

We are well aware of the dismal financial situation we are in right now; but do we really want to balance the state's budget of the backs of our patients? On the backs of our

parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins and siblings, who depend on us- and you as the elected officials- to ensure that the people whose hands their lives are put into are capable and ready for the challenge?

In times like these, we all must do more with less, and difficult choices must be made. But stopping an entire program that is devoted to ensuring that Connecticut's patients receive the best possible care is reckless, irresponsible, and shortsighted.

Furthermore, as an initiative to address the nursing shortage, the Connecticut Office for Workforce Competitiveness recommended a series of system improvements, including a creation of a partnership between technical high school adult health care programs and the public and private colleges.

The Connecticut LPN programs developed a partnership with community colleges, allowing for an easy adaptation from the LPN programs to the community college RN programs. Governor Rell herself, in a letter to Hilda Solis, Secretary of the US Department of Labor, identifies a unique cooperation between technical health care organizations in Connecticut as a reason to provide funding to the state.

How could Governor Rell shut down the state funded LPN programs when her request to the department of labor to answer the health care crisis in Connecticut includes the partnership between the technical schools and the colleges? It makes no sense to end programs that are working and adapting to the changing times when they are also so necessary to the public's welfare.

I ask that you reject the governor's proposal to suspend the LPN programs, and that you continue to invest in the future of our state's patients by ensuring those on the front lines of care are prepared, trained and equipped to meet our residents' needs.

Thank you again for your time.