

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-251
AN ACT EXPANDING TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR CAREERS IN HEALTH
Title: CARE.
Vote Date: 3/17/2022
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute
PH Date: 3/8/2022
File No.:

***Disclaimer:** The following JOINT FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.*

SPONSORS OF BILL:

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

To require the Office of Workforce Strategy to create a plan that addresses the workforce shortage in Connecticut's healthcare system.

Substitute language:

- Sec. 1: promotes OWS to the lead agency on this initiative; adds CCIC and the Connecticut Hospital Association as collaborating partners.
- Sec. 2: amends this provision to read "the Commissioner of Housing and the executive director of the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority to seek a partnership with one or more hospitals located in the state to increase workforce options."
- Sec. 3: adds community-based professional organizations to the planning team for high school outreach; extends the outreach beyond nursing to exploring careers as medical assistants, emergency department technicians, surgical assistants, and other high-demand healthcare careers.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Sean Bradbury, Senior Director of Government Relations and External Affairs, Connecticut State Colleges & Universities \(CSCU\)](#): The Connecticut State Colleges & Universities "strongly supports" [S.B. 251](#), maintaining that this bill would "focus on nursing and behavioral health professions" and "provide the foundation to stabilize and expand this critical workforce for the state's employers." [S.B. 251](#) comes at a time when healthcare programs have seen a sharp decline in enrollment due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and CSCU is committed

to working with the Office of Workforce Strategy "to expand enrollment in nursing and behavioral health programs" at institutions of higher education.

[Carl Lejuez, Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs, University of Connecticut](#): The University of Connecticut supports [S.B. 251](#), as it is "excited about collaborative opportunities that are possible within" this legislation. UConn and UConn Health play vital roles "in the expansion of the health care workforce in the state." With the necessary resources and the ability to collaborate with other organizations and agencies, "we can grow our existing training programs and serve as a partner in implementing key workforce aspects of" [S.B. 251](#).

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Representative Jason Rojas, House Majority Leader, Connecticut General Assembly](#): Representative Rojas supports [S.B. 251](#), stating that even as Connecticut moves "toward a post pandemic world, health care workers remain integral to the state's continued success in combatting the pandemic." However, the fact of the matter is that "the pandemic exacerbated a pre-existing health care and human services worker shortage in Connecticut." As many healthcare workers suffer from "burn-out" due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, "the need to invest in our health care and human services workforce pipeline has reached a critical level." [S.B. 251](#) highlights "The need to strengthen and build our health care workforce," which "has never been clearer," and it also requires "a non-partisan partnership between the public sector and the private sector."

[John Brady, Executive Vice President, AFT Connecticut](#): AFT Connecticut supports [S.B. 251](#), as this legislation "is a critical step in developing initiatives to address the shortage in nursing and all health care professions in the state." AFT Connecticut also believes that as "the largest union of acute care hospital Registered Nurses and Health Professionals in the state," their members could offer valuable insight on the legislation, as well as offering support and assistance, and the organization is requesting "inclusion in every step of the process." Additionally, AFT Connecticut also supports "initiatives that can more immediately help with the workforce shortage."

[Kimberly Clear-Sandor, Executive Director, Connecticut Nurses Association](#): The Connecticut Nurses Association supports the "intent of" [S.B. 251](#), specifically the "attention to building an infrastructure to create the future healthcare workforce, by creating a pipeline to accept, educate, and train more nurses in CT."

[Connecticut State Medical Society \(CSMS\)](#): The Connecticut State Medical Society supports [S.B. 251](#), as it would address "the critical issue of the medical workforce shortage in Connecticut, including the physician workforce shortage in Connecticut." The state also "loses the majority of the residents and fellows that we train in our state," and therefore, Connecticut has to provide "*meaningful* loan forgiveness programs." [S.B. 251](#) would help to rectify a "wholly unwelcoming and unfriendly medical practice climate for our new and existing physicians," and CSMS is committed to working with the Committee to address the problem of "Connecticut's dwindling physician workforce."

[Connecticut Hospital Association](#): The Connecticut Hospital Association supports [S.B. 251](#), as well as "suggests strengthening its provisions, and encourages broader action to support

the development and retention of the healthcare workers." Connecticut's healthcare workforce, specifically in hospitals, "is the most critical element in the provision of quality and safe care." The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated a healthcare workforce shortage that could compromise the care of many of those patients at hospitals and medical centers, which [S.B. 251](#) could help alleviate.

[Sherri Dayton, Jurisdictional Vice President, AFT Connecticut Healthcare](#): Sherri Dayton of AFT Connecticut Healthcare supports [S.B. 251](#), which would be beneficial to Connecticut's healthcare system "since we are currently in a healthcare shortage projected to worsen." Ms. Dayton also hopes "more immediate help is...considered," since legislators are looking to "long-term strategies to help exhausted healthcare workers" at the moment. In creating a safer work environment for healthcare workers, individuals would remain in Connecticut, "where healthcare organizations currently fail to retain staff."

[Ed Hawthorne, President, Connecticut AFL-CIO](#): Connecticut AFL-CIO supports [S.B. 251](#) because "The existing shortage of Connecticut nurses and other health care professionals is critical and demands immediate action." While hospitals and medical centers around the state were experiencing staff shortages prior to the pandemic, COVID-19 has "profoundly exacerbated" this issue, as many workers "feel like they are drowning." With much of the healthcare workforce in Connecticut feeling burned out and leaving the profession altogether, the "next generation...is not large enough, nor experienced enough." While [S.B. 251](#) does provide "a major step forward in addressing these shortages," CT AFL-CIO recommends that the Committee "provide representation of frontline healthcare workers in developing these workforce initiatives," as it would be considered a "missed opportunity" for their experiences to be excluded from "these endeavors." Finally, CT AFL-CIO suggests that the legislature "take action on measures that can immediately address the workforce shortage."

[Sarah Matney, Senior Vice President of Clinical Services & Chief Nursing Officer, Connecticut Children's Medical Center](#): Connecticut Children's Medical Center has struggled "to find qualified staff for many positions in our health system," and this problem is common among "other hospitals and healthcare providers across the state." Due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, "healthcare workers have faced unique sacrifices and challenges," many of them are "burnt-out," and the pandemic has exacerbated the staffing shortage that predates COVID-19. Therefore, Connecticut Children's Medical Center supports [S.B. 251](#) and recommends that the legislature "place particular focus on the needs of the healthcare workforce," as well as "invest in a robust healthcare workforce pipeline to ensure that we have sufficient trained medical professionals to care for ourselves and our loved ones." Finally, "We also must aim to have a healthcare workforce as diverse as our patient population" in order to better reflect the "communities we serve."

[Mag Morelli, President, LeadingAge Connecticut](#): On behalf of LeadingAge Connecticut, Ms. Morelli offers testimony in support of [S.B. 251](#) and appreciates the Committee's "effort to develop initiatives to address the state's health care workforce shortage and to increase the number of health care workers in the state." While there is "no one silver bullet to solve this problem," the proposals presented within [S.B. 251](#) "include many elements of a solution." First, LeadingAge recommends to the legislature that the state should "explore other ways of implementing or expanding aging services sector training that is both accessible and affordable," based on the success of the "temporary CNA" online course. Second, LeadingAge is committed to working with other healthcare organizations across Connecticut

to "encourage the pursuit of nursing careers" aimed towards high school students. One way to inform this potential workforce is through the investment in "a strong public relations campaign," like Wisconsin initiated in 2018. Finally, there are ways that the state can alleviate the workforce shortage, like expanding "the number of locations where a person can go to have their fingerprints scanned," so that it is "accessible and unintimidating to job candidates."

[Christina Morrissey, Health Policy Chair, Connecticut APRN Society](#): Testifying on behalf of the Connecticut APRN Society, Ms. Morrissey supports [S.B. 251](#) and is "pleased to see the attention given to the shortage of healthcare providers in the state of Connecticut." More specifically, the CT APRN Society "would like to underscore the importance of addressing additional language that impact the ability of APRNs to be trained and work in the state of Connecticut." Currently, APRNs in Connecticut are required to "have a collaborative agreement with a physician for the first 3 years of practice," but "the collaborative agreement requirement is not associated with improved quality of care" and it makes "attracting APRNs from out of state very difficult." Therefore, the Society recommends that the legislature consider including "language specifically for collaboration agreements for APRNs from out of state," and consider including "language to allow for a collaborative agreement of new graduate APRNs with fellow APRNs as well as physicians." These updates, along with [S.B. 251](#), would "help Connecticut to attract and keep the healthcare providers that it trains while maintaining high standards of care."

[Coco Sellman, Co-Owner, All Pointe Home Care](#): Ms. Sellman of All Pointe Home Care supports [S.B. 251](#), but encourages the Committee to engage in "broader action to support the retention, training, and development of the healthcare workforce, especially as it pertains to home health care." Home health agencies have both struggled with workforce challenges and have had difficulty offering "competitive wages to our nurses, home health aides, and therapists." During the COVID-19 pandemic, healthcare workers have "left home health for other care settings that can pay more and offer better benefits," losing a critical component of Connecticut's healthcare system to entities that are more competitive overall. The result of this phenomena is that "Access to care has been dangerously diminished," and [S.B. 251](#) would be a "good start (but by no means a final solution)" to this issue affecting Connecticut's home healthcare agencies.

[Nathan Tinker, Chief Executive Officer, Connecticut Pharmacists Association \(CPA\)](#): The Connecticut Pharmacists Association "fully support[s]" the goal of [S.B. 251](#) to increase "the number of health care workers in the state through the offering of expanded and enhanced educational programs at public institutions of higher education." This legislation comes at a critical time when "The industry [as a whole] is feeling the strain of worker shortages at all levels," but more specifically involving "shortages in the pharmacy technician field." For example, the Pharmacy Technician Certification Board (PTCB) currently has "over 13,000 open positions" on its career website as "hospitals, retail and community pharmacies, and long-term care facilities" struggle to "meet their need for qualified technicians." Investments in healthcare training programs at higher education institutions, "as well as initiatives that would encourage high school students to explore careers in pharmacy," would have a "positive impact on the ability of the industry to meet its workforce requirements today and tomorrow."

[Jennifer Widness, President, Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges \(CCIC\)](#): The Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges supports [S.B. 251](#), and more specifically,

supports "the need for the state to develop initiatives that address the shortage of nursing and health care professionals" in the state. The CCIC asks for two revisions to be made to [S.B. 251](#), specifically to expand "the scope of the work...to include independent colleges," and to "suggest that Office of Workforce Strategy be tasked to take the lead on this effort in Section 1, in partnership with" OHE.

[Tracy Wodatch, President and CEO, Connecticut Association for Healthcare at Home](#): The Connecticut Association for Healthcare at Home supports [S.B. 251](#), as well as encourages "broader action to support the development and retention of the healthcare workforce especially in the field of home care." The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has increased "workforce shortages to critically high numbers," and while "All healthcare settings" are facing this problem, "home care struggles on its own for several rather unique reasons." The Association commends and appreciates the Committee's "focus on this critical issue," but suggests considering a "broader approach, outside hospital and nursing home walls, to meeting the healthcare workforce challenges in our state."

[Sara LeMaster, Manager of Government Relations and Public Policy, Community Health Center Association of Connecticut](#): Sara LeMaster offered verbal testimony in support of [S.B. 251](#), saying that "this bill will help to address the workforce shortages that we're experiencing and we hope that this dramatically expands our ability to do primary care workforce development," which is "a very important component of our health infrastructure."

21 organizations submitted joint testimony in support of [S.B. 251](#):

- [Association of Connecticut Ambulance Providers](#)
- [Community Medical Group](#)
- [Connecticut Academy of PAs](#)
- [Connecticut Assisted Living Association](#)
- [Connecticut Association for Healthcare at Home](#)
- [Connecticut Association of Ambulatory Surgery Centers](#)
- [Connecticut Association of Marriage and Family Therapists](#)
- [Connecticut Association of Health Care Facilities](#)
- [Connecticut Center for Assisted Living](#)
- [Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges](#)
- [Connecticut Counseling Association](#)
- [Community Health Center, Inc.](#)
- [Community Health Center Association of CT](#)
- [Connecticut Hospital Association](#)
- [Connecticut Psychological Association](#)
- [Connecticut Society for Respiratory Care](#)
- [Connecticut State Medical Society](#)
- [LeadingAge Connecticut](#)
- [Radiological Society of Connecticut](#)
- [Radiological Technologists](#)
- [Yale University](#)

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None Expressed for Senate Bill 251.

Reported by: Austin Hyatt

Date: 3/23/2022