

# Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

## JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** HB-5441

AN ACT CONCERNING CLINICAL PLACEMENTS FOR NURSING STUDENTS, THE ESTABLISHMENT OF REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIPS FOR TEACHERS, REPORTING BY THE OFFICE OF WORKFORCE STRATEGY, PROMOTION OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INSURANCE INDUSTRY AND

**Title:** A STUDENT LOAN SUBSIDY FOR HIGH-DEMAND PROFESSIONS.

**Vote Date:** 3/14/2023

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable

**PH Date:** 2/7/2023

**File No.:**

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### SPONSORS OF BILL:

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee,  
Rep. Khanna, 149<sup>th</sup> District,  
Rep. Gee, 126<sup>th</sup> District,  
Rep. Denning, 42<sup>nd</sup> District.

### REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill would create a working group to enhance clinical placements for nursing students at state facilities, provide tax credits for nursing preceptors, establish a registered apprenticeship program for teachers, encourage the growth of the insurance industry, and introduce a Student Loan Subsidy Program for professions in high demand. The healthcare and education workers across Connecticut have indicated a significant shortage of staff at all levels of the industry. To address this shortage, the proposed tax credits will motivate more students to enroll in these programs and stay in Connecticut upon graduation. Additionally, the increased availability of clinical placements and apprenticeship programs will offer more opportunities for students to gain training and enter these highly sought-after professions.

### RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental Loan Authority \(CHESLA\), Executive Director, Jeannette W. Weldon](#): supports the intent of this bill but clarifies that they do not have funds to provide for a loan subsidy or forgiveness program as outlined in the underlying bills. It was stated that their ability to provide such a program is dependent on identifying a funding mechanism for the loans and subsidy provided by the legislation.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

[Connecticut Business and Industry Association, Government Affairs Associate, Ashley Zane:](#) Supports this bill as it aims to address growing labor shortages in teaching and healthcare by establishing a student loan forgiveness program or public-private partnership. It was stated that statistics from a Connecticut Education Association poll indicated high levels of frustration, burnout, and turnover among educators and healthcare workers. It was also stated offering student loan repayment benefits degree seekers by lowering costs and increasing opportunities for struggling residents which would help promote a competitive and attractive workplace for these sectors.

[Connecticut Children's Medical Center \(CCMC\), Senior Vice President, Clinical Services & Chief Nursing Officer, Sarah Matney, MSOL, BSN, RN, CPON, CENP:](#) supports this bill because of the potential to encourage college graduates to pursue healthcare careers in the State and mitigate current healthcare worker shortages. It was stated that a robust pediatric workforce is necessary to meeting the unique healthcare needs of children and CCMC maintains a commitment to training new clinical leaders. It was also stated that the healthcare providers across the state are facing significant workforce shortages making it difficult to find qualified staff for many positions. It was further stated that incentives like student loan forgiveness and a more robust healthcare career pipeline are necessary to ensure that hospitals and health systems have the staff they need to provide care to patients, and that they can recruit a diverse staff reflective of the community they serve.

[Connecticut Veterinary Medical Association \(CVMA\), Dr. Andrea Dennis:](#) supports this bill but and asked that the Committee include veterinarians as healthcare professionals. It was stated that Connecticut is experiencing a shortage of veterinarians, with open positions taking over a year to fill, resulting in long wait times for pet owners and challenges for practice owners in finding relief veterinarians. It was also stated that providing financial relief to veterinary students would be beneficial since they currently pay an average of \$55,000 in tuition fees as out-of-state students in addition to living expenses because Connecticut does not have a veterinary medicine school. It was further stated that reinstating the Kirklyn M. Kerr program would assist in veterinary recruitment as the program reduced the cost for the student to attend out of state veterinary programs to that of in-state tuition and required students to return to Connecticut and practice veterinary medicine for the financial assistance to be forgiven.

[Connecticut Education Association, President, Kate Dias:](#) supports this bill because of the establishment of the loan forgiveness program is a necessary incentive to attract educators to the field as the shortage of teachers in Connecticut needs urgent action. It was stated that unfilled teaching positions in the State exceed 1,200, and nearly three out of four teachers planning to leave the profession early. It was also stated that there are several other mechanisms to address the teacher shortage, such as depositing \$100 million of the budget surplus into an interest-bearing fund for public institutions of higher education, providing tuition-free teacher preparation programs, eliminating edTPA, and giving student teachers a stipend for their time and work.

[LeadingAge Connecticut, President, Mag Morelli:](#) supports this bill because finding solutions to the workforce crisis is a priority and a collaboration among healthcare associations is

necessary. It was stated that this bill includes financial incentives for college students to pursue healthcare and aging services careers, which could make education in the field more accessible to those who might not otherwise be able to afford it. It was also acknowledged that the workforce crisis in aging services requires action on many fronts and working collaboratively to develop wide ranging solutions is necessary to ensure that older adults receive the care and services they need.

[Stamford Health, President and CEO, Kathleen Silard](#): supports this bill as it would implement a student loan forgiveness program or public-private partnership to encourage graduates to pursue careers in teaching or healthcare in Connecticut. It is stated that the healthcare industry provides good wages and growth opportunities for employees, but Stamford Health and the industry have experienced workforce shortages across all levels of employment since the pandemic. It is also stated that the bill would complement the state's efforts to train individuals for careers in healthcare and increase the number of employees needed in areas with substantial shortages.

[University of Hartford, Dean, College of Education, Nursing, and Health Professions, Dr. Cesarina Thompson](#): supports this bill to establish a student loan forgiveness program because it would encourage college graduates to pursue careers in teaching or healthcare in Connecticut. It is stated that while there are cyclical shortages in the nursing profession, the COVID pandemic has generated unprecedented circumstances resulting in significant challenges in the teaching profession and a critical teacher shortage. It is also stated that investing in resources to attract and retain teachers and healthcare providers is essential for the high quality of education and healthcare systems in the state.

Five additional pieces of written testimony were submitted in support of this bill:

[All Pointe Home Care, Co-Owner, Coco Sellman – supports](#)

[Connecticut Association for Healthcare at Home, President and CEO, Tracy Wodatch – supports](#)

[New Haven Federation for Teachers, Local 933, President, Leslie Blatteau – supports](#)

[Connecticut Hospital Association – supports](#)

[Western Connecticut State University, Chair, Education & Educational Psychology Department, Dr. Katherine Roe – supports](#)

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

[Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges \(CCIC\), President, Jennifer Widness](#); supports the intent of bill and others aimed at providing scholarships or loan forgiveness to students seeking degrees in certain industries but requests that any scholarship or loan forgiveness opportunities created for students attending Connecticut public colleges also be made available to students attending relevant degree programs at private, non-profit colleges in the state. It is stated that CCIC's 15 private, non-profit colleges enroll over 80,000 students

in Connecticut annually and play a significant role in training individuals in various fields, such as educators, law enforcement officials, health professions, and engineers.

**Reported by: Lukas Houle**

**Date: 3/20/2023**