



Rhode Island Health Care Association

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2024 – H 7826

AN ACT RELATING TO BUSINESSES AND PROFESSIONS – NURSES

Date: March 11, 2024

Position: Support

This testimony is submitted on behalf of the Rhode Island Health Care Association (RIHCA). RIHCA is a trade association with sixty-three (63) member nursing facilities in the State of Rhode Island, representing some 80% of the profession.

RIHCA supports H 7826.

The prolonged COVID-19 pandemic had a devastating impact on the healthcare workforce. As a result, Rhode Island employers are in the midst of an unprecedented workforce crisis, especially within the healthcare sector, and particularly within nursing facilities. Since the start of the pandemic, RI's nursing home workforce is down 16.1%. In February 2020, RI nursing facilities employed 9,797 employees compared to 8,215 in the most recent data from the most recent Bureau of Labor Statistics data. That is a decrease of 1,582. Registered nurses and Certified Nursing Assistants are the top two advertised positions currently.

This workforce shortage has resulted in skyrocketing labor costs. These increased costs, given over a decade of chronic Medicaid underfunding, have created the perfect storm. Six facilities have closed since the start of the pandemic, three went into receivership, and others are on record that they are at significant risk. Clearly this is not sustainable, and something will have to give. Nursing facilities need meaningful reimbursement enhancements to offset these shortfalls and provide them the opportunity to compete to recruit and retain healthcare workers within the broader healthcare sector.

Even with the appropriate funding, there are currently not sufficient applicants willing to fill these essential roles. This will take a longer-term solution to stabilize the workforce and entice individuals to come back to the healthcare sector or to join the workforce for the first time. Allowing nursing students to practice before taking or receiving results of the National Council Licensure Exam (NCLEX) may help to address this labor shortage, at least in part.

Therefore, RIHCA supports the provisions of H 7826 allowing graduate nurses to practice within Rhode Island's licensed healthcare facilities prior to their taking and getting the results of their NCLEX exam. With proper oversight and mentorship during this interim period, graduate nurses will enhance staffing within Rhode Island nursing facilities and provide much needed care and services to the residents entrusted to their care. It will also expose them to the nursing facility setting and enhance the likelihood of their choosing a career in the State's nursing homes.

Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John E. Gage", is written over a circular stamp or seal.

John E. Gage, MBA, NHA
President & CEO

"Setting the Pace in Nursing Home Care"

A non-profit organization of proprietary and non-proprietary long term health care facilities dedicated to improving health care of the convalescent and chronically ill of all ages. An equal opportunity employer.