

NEWS

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HARI

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HARI ANNOUNCES LEGISLATION TO ADDRESS HEALTH CARE WORKFORCE SHORTAGE

Providence, RI – The Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training predicts that employment in health care will rise by nearly 13,000 jobs from 2004 to 2014. Meanwhile, employment for registered nurses is expected to increase nearly 30 percent accounting for 3,000 nursing positions.

The Hospital Association of Rhode Island (HARI) has introduced legislation to the Rhode Island General Assembly aimed at addressing this health care workforce shortage through the establishment of the Center for Health Professions. The Center will work to address the shortage and retention of qualified health care professionals available to meet the needs of Rhode Island's patients.

The Health Partnership Council (HPC) will serve as the advisory board for The Center. The HPC, established in 1998 and housed at HARI, provides opportunity for labor, educators, employers and decision makers to collaborate and strengthen our workforce through retention and recruitment strategies. Once established the Center will:

- Serve as a repository for health care workforce data
- Provide professional development opportunities and training
- Serve as a resource for health care workers seeking to reenter the workforce
- Provide industry-based nurses with an opportunity to explore the nursing faculty role
- Establish the Statewide Student Nurse Clinical Placement Registry to expand nursing students' opportunities to use skills and classroom applications in health care settings

In addition to requesting a one-time appropriation of \$250,000 for the establishment of the Center for Health Professions and Statewide Student Nurse Clinical Placement Registry, the legislation also seeks \$250,000 to support incentives for nursing students. These funds would expand the existing nursing loan repayment program to be available to continuing education students and nurses working in an expanded number of health care settings. It would allow for the addition of loan forgiveness as well as interest forgiveness.

The legislation also proposes the establishment of a nursing education scholarship program within the Higher Education Assistance Authority. \$250,000 would be used to provide scholarships to eligible nursing students to defray the cost of their professional education. In addition, the legislation requests assistance in addressing the shortage of nursing faculty available to teach students by providing a \$3,000 tax credit to full-time nurse faculty teaching in the state's schools of nursing.

"We must act now to ensure that there are appropriately trained health care professionals able to meet the health care needs of Rhode Islanders," said Edward Quinlan, president of the Hospital Association of Rhode Island. "It is predicted that we will need 3,000 nurses by 2012. The Center for Health Professions will serve as an important resource in meeting this need."

“While recent collaborative efforts have successfully increased interest in nursing as a profession, we now face a shortage of masters prepared faculty and sufficient resources to increase nursing school capacity,” said Ruth Ricciarelli, director of workforce development at the Hospital Association of Rhode Island and director of the Health Partnership Council. “These factors may significantly extend the length of time necessary to complete the program, and ultimately prolong students’ entrance into the workforce.”

“We must support our nursing workforce and meet the health care needs of our state’s population,” said Sen. Juan Pichardo, sponsor of the legislation. “It is vital that an incentive is provided to attract and retain nurses in our state. We must ensure that quality, valuable health care is provided to all patients.”

“Nurses are central to our health care system. We must recognize their contributions in providing superior patient care,” said Rep. Thomas Slater, sponsor of the legislation. “This legislation and the establishment of the Center for Health Professions is an important step in ensuring that our health care system is ready to meet the needs patients.”

“The shortage of nurses in our state is well documented,” said Sen. Stephen Alves, chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. “Stakeholders continue to point to a shortage of nurse faculty as an obstacle in increasing the supply. This legislation will help to alleviate the nurse faculty shortage and ensure nursing students enter the workforce in a timely manner.”

“The Center for Health Professions will further the tremendous work being conducted by the Health Partnership Council,” said Jack Warner, commissioner of higher education at the Rhode Island Office of Higher Education. “The collaboration of higher education and industry is the only way to address the health care workforce shortages.”

“This collaborative effort will provide Rhode Island’s nurses with the support and guidance needed to progress in their careers,” said Donna Policastro, NP, executive director of the Rhode Island State Nurses Association. “The Center will provide nurses with additional resources to support their role as health care professionals.”

Sponsors of the legislation include Senators Juan Pichardo, Joshua Miller, John Tassoni, Rhoda Perry, and Maryellen Goodwin and Representatives Thomas Slater, Joseph Almeida, Grace Diaz, Elizabeth Dennigan and Eileen Naughton.

Founded over a half century ago, the Hospital Association of Rhode Island is a statewide trade organization that assists member hospitals in effectively meeting the health care needs of Rhode Island, through advocacy, representation, education and services. HARI members work collaboratively to improve the quality of care delivered and address issues threatening access to health care including increasing health costs, workforce shortages and decreasing reimbursement. HARI members work together to ensure that all Rhode Islanders will receive comprehensive, high quality health care.