



New Hampshire State Commission on Aging

SB 403: Relative to Health Care Workforce Investments

Senate Health & Human Services

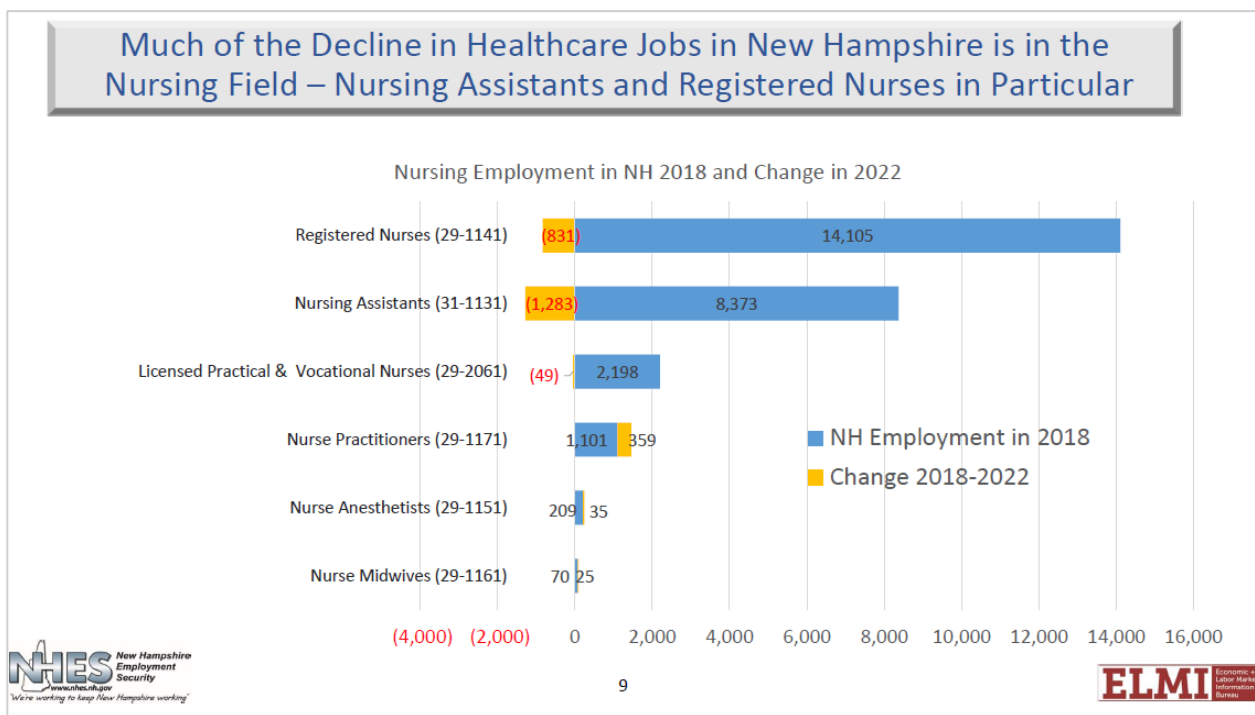
Wednesday, January 9, 2023

Chair Senator Birdsell, and Members of the Senate Health & Human Services Committee

This testimony is respectfully submitted by Rebecca Sky, the Executive Director of the NH State Commission on Aging. The NH State Commission on Aging is in support of this bill as written. New Hampshire has a well-documented significant and growing shortage of healthcare workers. The Commission on Aging focuses particular attention on direct care workers including personal care aides, home health aides, licensed nursing assistants (LNAs), community health workers, nurses, and other care partners. The Commission on Aging’s Annual report for the past two years has named growing this workforce as one of the top priorities for New Hampshire.

What is the shortage?

Data from NH Department of Employment Security indicates an **overall decrease of 12% in the long-term care workforce and 23% specifically within the skilled nursing workforce from 2015 to 2022**. According to the Workforce Data Center at PHI, using employment trends sourced from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, **New Hampshire will need approximately 24,400 more direct care workers than we currently have by 2028**. An inadequate workforce results in unmet need and adverse health outcomes.



New Hampshire needs the direct care workforce to be available, stabilized, and qualified. Direct care workers typically spend more time with an individual than any other member of a support team. They can avert costly life changing events and sometimes make the difference between life and death. Growing the direct care workforce is one of the most critical responsibilities facing our state.



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Benefits of this bill:

There are many, many benefits to New Hampshire in this bill. Here are a few highlights:

Part 7 –

Community Health Workers add immense value to a healthcare team supporting the fundamentals to good health. Among other tasks they facilitate access to health care and social services, and other community health integration services. They connect older people to transportation to get to appointments, to Meals on Wheels programs for nutrition and Senior Companion services preventing social isolation, support use of telehealth, and more. Professionalizing this workforce, recognizing their contributions as a critical part of the healthcare team, enabling reimbursement is a high value proposition. It will help to keep people out of hospital emergency rooms (and the pipeline to nursing homes) by helping people to successfully age in their homes.

Part 8 –

- I. DHHS Division of Public Health Rural Health and Primary Care Pipeline Workforce Development Program with New Hampshire Area Health Education Centers. The stated goal in the first sentence, “to increase the number of entry-level clinical staff, including direct care workers”, aligns with Commission on Aging recommendations. The work NH AHEC has done and can do with more resources is critical to growing the local workforce we need.
- III. A family medicine program in Coos County will increase capacity for primary care services in one of the oldest-aged counties in New Hampshire.
- IV. Support for a health care workforce information center is critical because without good data, we cannot target our efforts to areas of greatest need or build on what’s working. It will support being efficient with limited workforce development funds.
- V. Speaking of what’s working exceptionally well – the **NH Needs Caregivers Program** does a fabulous job supporting the development of the LNA workforce. Program data from 5 months of work from June 2023 through November 2023 indicates successful initial recruitment of 983 people to learn more about the program, 85 folks receiving scholarships, shepherding 88 participants to complete an LNA course with 68 becoming licensed. The program also connects participants to employment and through the first months of employment if desired by participant. Findings from a federal health profession opportunity grant suggests that subsidized training and supports such as help with childcare and transportation as is offered in this program improve training completion translating to more workers.

While this is an expensive bill, the cost of not investing in a healthcare workforce, and in particular the direct care workforce would be detrimental to our state’s economy.

The Commission on Aging, established in 2019, is charged with advising the governor and general court on issues related to aging in recognition that New Hampshire, demographically speaking, is becoming older. Thoughtful shaping of public policy and investing across generations will ready our state for this change and foster a future in which we can all thrive at any age.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rebecca Sky".

Rebecca Sky, MPH
Executive Director
NH State Commission on Aging