

**Testimony from the Civil Service Employees Association  
regarding**

***“The Impact of the Workforce Shortage and Models to Improve  
Long Term Care Workforce Availability, Readiness, Recruitment  
and Retention”***

**Submitted to the New York State Senate Committees on Aging,  
Health, and Labor**

**July 20, 2021**

Thank you for holding this hearing and allowing us to submit testimony regarding the impact of the workforce shortage and models to improve long term care workforce availability, readiness, recruitment, and retention.

The Civil Service Employees Association (CSEA) represents employees at state, county, and privately operated nursing homes across the state. Our members include registered and licensed practical nurses, certified nursing assistants, ancillary employees who support resident's daily care, and administrative staff. Every day CSEA members provide compassionate and quality care to residents who may be in their final stage of life.

Over the past decade, we have seen a dramatic increase in long term care staff turnover. Positions that a person would stay in for their entire career is now simply a short employment stopover for many. This problem is not unique to New York. A recent study shows that nursing home workers turned over at a mean rate of 128% in 2017 and 2018.<sup>1</sup> The rates were greater than 100% for three sets of nursing home workers — registered nurses (141%), certified nursing assistants (129%), and licensed practical nurses (114%). Having to re-hire more than 100% of your staff on an annual basis is not sustainable nor beneficial to the residents of the facilities who may suffer diminished care due to the constant churn.

<sup>1</sup> “Nursing Homes Have 94% Staff Turnover Rate with Even Higher Churn at Low Rated Facilities,” *Skilled Nursing News*, March 2021 (<https://skillednursingnews.com/2021/03/nursing-homes-have-94-staff-turnover-rate-with-even-higher-churn-at-low-rated-facilities/>)

This year, state lawmakers took action to attempt to ensure that nursing home residents receive a standard number of hours of care, regardless of what type of nursing home they are in. While CSEA is strongly supportive of this law, we believe that for it to be successful we need a significant influx of additional staff to make this law effective without overburdening existing staff with massive levels of overtime.

While this hearing is specific to long term care, we cannot look at this issue in a vacuum. Many of the topics that we will discuss are also applicable to other health care employers and direct care programs. Employers in these sectors recruit from the same pool of applicants and are competing against one another to hire them. Due to this, any actions we take in this area will directly affect other sectors as well. We need a cohesive, multi-industry statewide plan that allows us to train a new pool of workers for this field and to allow nursing homes to recruit and retain them over time.

While not a panacea, we believe the following recommendations will help increase the nursing home workforce, solidify the financial footing of existing nursing homes, and ensure that residents are receiving the care that they deserve.

### **Invest in Job Training Programs for High School and GED Students, and Adult Learners**

The State must enhance the number of job training programs in the health care field and better connect job training programs with actual jobs and employers. Despite the cultural mantra that everyone should go to college, many do not want to. However, many high school students, participants of GED programs, and adult learners want to learn a health care skill that they can immediately use in the workforce.

We need to increase the number of health care job training programs in programs like BOCES (Board of Cooperative Educational Services) and make them accessible to anyone who wants to learn a skill in this field. Creating new and more encompassing programs for these students to earn an accreditation would allow these students to enter the workforce upon graduation. This would give them an immediate career while also filling the vital staffing needs at state nursing homes. While some of these programs currently exist, we must better connect the students with employment in areas where we have the greatest need.

### **Creation of a Career Ladder for Workers**

Many employees begin working at a nursing home only to leave shortly after because they do not see a path to having a career in the industry or at the facility. Working with nursing homes and hospitals, and SUNY (State University of New York) and Community Colleges, we must create a career ladder for nursing home workers.

A career ladder would allow someone to visualize their life in 5 or 10 years working in long term care, rather than just seeing their job as a temporary stop. Under this plan, long term care facilities and the state would encourage, and subsidize the cost of, a CNA to become, over time, a licensed practical or a registered nurse. State policy should be to encourage workers to continue learning and earning accreditations, while committing to work in the long-term care field for

certain amounts of time. Offering programs like this will encourage individuals to continue working in the field while also giving them more training and responsibility.

### **New Funding Pools for Recruitment and Retention**

Lastly, due to the insufficient resources available for public and not-for-profit nursing homes, it is exceedingly difficult for them to compete with more profitable employers, which hurts their ability to recruit and retain employees. CSEA supports the creation of a new state funding pool for the recruitment and retention of employees. This pool would give facilities with fewer resources an avenue to pay their workers a better wage to attempt to retain existing workers or recruit new ones.

### **Prohibit New For-Profit Nursing Home Operators**

Years ago, a sizable portion of nursing homes were operated by counties. Counties offered good wages and health insurance and a desirable pension. This combination of pay and benefits helped keep a stable workforce in these public nursing homes and a continuity of care.

However, over the last several decades, for-profit nursing homes began to create new nursing homes and purchased existing ones from counties. This has changed the mission of a county nursing home from offering care to the neediest residents of a county to ensuring that investors make a profit. To make a profit, they have squeezed wages and diluted benefits, which is a big factor in the inability of many nursing homes to recruit and retain staff.

Years of evidence has shown that there is not a silver bullet to fix this problem. However, staffing issues could be minimized if we paid long term care workers a high wage, better benefits, and showed them that they have ways to grow professionally in this industry. It will take a substantial commitment from the state, and cooperation with the long-term care industry, to accomplish this. However, failure to secure an influx of workers in this field will make it harder for nursing home residents to receive the quality and compassionate care that they deserve.

Thank you.

*For additional information or to discuss this issue further, please contact Joshua Terry, Legislative Director, CSEA Local 1000, at (518) 436-8622.*