

State of Connecticut  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY



PUBLIC HEALTH COMMITTEE  
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING HARTFORD,  
CT 06106-1591

Task Force to Study Methods to Address the Shortage of Radiologic Technologists,  
Nuclear Medicine Technologists and Respiratory Care Practitioners in the State

Meeting Summary

Wednesday, November 20,

2024

1:00 PM on Zoom and YouTube Live

I. Convene Meeting and Review of the Charge

- Bernadette Mele convened the meeting at 1:05 PM.
- Attendance: Bernadette Mele, Matthew Green, Rep. Cristin McCarthy-Vahey, Sajjad Raza, Adam Kaye, and Karen Griffiths

II. Reports and Discussion

- Bernadette Mele stated the charge of the Task Force and commented on the subgroup meeting regarding the five areas of recommendations they choose to focus on. The areas are student loans or tuition assistance, loan forgiveness, grant funding, recruitment and an interstate licensure compact. She addressed why the shortage is so critical and stated the stakes for Connecticut's communities. She went over the first recommendation of student loans or tuition assistance to expand pathways to enter the field. She asked Matthew Green and Karen Griffiths to expound on the recommendation.

- Karen Griffiths believes that we must address the critical issue that patients are already being harmed due to the shortage and that the shortage is increasing healthcare costs. She stated that for respiratory therapy they do not have enough students in the programs, and they discovered that cost was a barrier so tuition assistance would incentivize students to enter these programs. She mentioned that they mirrored this assistance like that in the Horizon's Grant.
- Matthew Green added that tuition assistance will allow for programs to further market themselves to students and he commented how other modalities get support which makes the other modalities more attractive while their modalities are left behind. He asked Karen Griffiths to speak about the schools having a hard time capacity building due to costs and about the clinical instructor issue for respiratory therapists.
- Karen Griffiths emphasized that it is about making pathways and mentioned that funding for schools could fall under the grant recommendation. She commented that providing clinical instruction is very important to all their professions and that hospitals are so short staffed where they cannot help train people in their profession which is currently happening. She added that respiratory therapists are paying clinical instructors, and these costs are sometimes higher than tuition. She believes that building a system where clinical instructors are available where it would be less of a burden to the medical institutions would help in reducing the shortage.
- Bernadette Mele went over recommendation three of Grant Funding where it is about expanding current grants as well as eligibility criteria and she commented that they were inspired from the Horizon's grant.
- Karen Griffiths stated that she came up with this recommendation and was inspired by the Horizon's grant where it is more of an initiative than a grant. She believes that legislative assistance for degree advancement is another important initiative as they have shortages in all rungs of the structure. She added that it would be helpful to promote degree advancement to already working practitioners for the growth of their professions. She commented on the idea of medical institutions offering career fairs to raise awareness of certain professions to encourage entry.
- Matthew Green believes that the grant funding will help expand high school programs, expand marketing and education opportunities as well as work synergistically with tuition assistance.
- Karen Griffiths added that the Horizon's initiative had an initiative called innovative programs where grant money covered people applying for innovative programs that develop curriculum to help with getting more professionals in the field. She believes that doing something similar could be

helpful in addressing the shortage.

- Bernadette Mele asked the Task Force for discussion regarding recommendations one and three and if there would be any opposition to combining them.
- Karen Griffiths answered that she has mixed feelings as she feels like the recommendations should be separate, but she is open to suggestions.
- Bernadette Mele asked if there is any further discussion.
- Adam Kaye asked if it would be more appropriate for them to be separate as recommendation one is more practical while recommendation three is more aspirational and added that he doesn't know which strategy they should go with.
- Karen Griffiths added that the Horizon's Grant allocated a certain amount of money, so it wasn't an unlimited pool of funds.
- Rep. McCarthy-Vahey commented that they can go either way as she believes that it isn't unreasonable to ask for more than what they think they can get as it is a negotiation process. This approach would be up to the preference of the Task Force.
- Bernadette Mele stated that they can leave the recommendations separate and in the order that they are currently in. She went over recommendation two which is Loan Forgiveness, and how it relates to the current Connecticut Student Loan Repayment Program as it would recommend strengthening loan repayment options, include allied health professionals, increase repayment for long-term service commitments and partner with healthcare providers for matching repayment.
- Karen Griffiths asked if the recommendation is to state that they are facing a critical shortage and that they should be added to the program as well.
- Bernadette Mele responded affirmatively.
- Matthew Green added that they will have to prove that there is a big enough shortage, and that it is critical enough to be included in the program.
- Rep. McCarthy-Vahey noted that the work of the legislative session is impacted by the federal landscape and that there have been conversations at the federal level that can impact the work of Task Force.
- Bernadette Mele believes that they should keep that in consideration, however they should move forward with their recommendations to address

the shortage.

- Rep. McCarthy-Vahey agrees with that statement.
- Bernadette Mele mentioned recommendation four which is about recruitment, and she asked Karen Griffiths or Matthew Green to explain this recommendation.
- Karen Griffiths commented that they have identified a national problem with capacity of programs as they are ten percent filled while there is a thirty-one percent vacancy rate. She stated that Connecticut mirrors those national trends as state capacities are fifty-nine percent filled. She believes that raising awareness of these professions as well as establishing pathways for highschoolers would help alleviate the shortage. She mentioned that HOSA programs get grant funding, but the issue is having a teacher with a health science certificate. She believes that expanding the number of teachers with a health science certificate will allow for more schools to start clubs that could raise awareness of their professions. She added that the number of HOSA clubs are limited in Connecticut because of the lack of teachers with a health science certificate.
- Matthew Green seconded Karen Griffiths statement. He shared an experience where their hospital brought in highschoolers to teach them about the various professions. He added that he feels that other professions get support that they usually don't, and he believes that this recommendation will raise awareness for their professions as well as help to create pathways.
- Bernadette Mele agrees that raising awareness to these already interested students will help in expanding the field. She went over recommendation five which is recommending an interstate medical licensure compact. She added that it's important for the Task Force to discuss but not as much as the other recommendations.
- Adam Kaye added that reciprocity is a double-edged sword as they could as easily lose someone to another state as they could easily gain someone from another state. He stated that sometimes these things are in place as a sort of protective measure and cautioned too much reciprocity as it could hurt them. He believes that the idea is to have people live in state, be trained in state and stay in state. He stated that this typically doesn't happen.
- Karen Griffiths agrees with that. She added that the issue is complicated and that they may need more data.
- Matthew Green agrees with Adam Kaye regarding how many people are training in Connecticut and about the double-edged sword. He added that it is a tool for travelers that they are losing out on as they help deal with acute

issues and they could be losing that option if they don't pick up the recommendation. He stated that people are choosing the path of least resistance and being a traveler is a choice and losing that option could exacerbate the shortage. He believes that this recommendation is to address the shortage now while the other recommendations will address the shortage long term.

- Adam Kaye agrees that travelers help in the short term, but he added that the ballooning of the traveler's industry has been determinantal to Connecticut and the nation overall. He stated that if they implement the recommendations of the Task Force then the interstate licensure compact recommendation would harm their efforts as they would train all this staff to leave the state. He believes that they must protect themselves long term and would like the recommendation to be time limited to the current crisis and with the ability to be retractable.
- Rep. McCarthy-Vahey noted that from the standpoint of the legislature they have done compacts and that there has been a push to get compacts done by various stakeholders.
- Karen Griffiths echoed Adam Kaye's comment about travelers being detrimental and shared that when they sent out surveys, they received responses about travelers being an issue. She stated that the use of travelers is scarily high and that she agrees that it is a double-edged sword.
- Bernadette Mele moved on to the voting of the recommendations and if they should be accepted. She asked for a motion to accept recommendation one which is about student loans and tuition assistance.
- Karen Griffiths motioned for recommendation one, and Adam Kaye seconded.
- The Task Force voted to accept recommendation one.
- Bernadette Mele asked for a motion of acceptance for recommendation two which is about loan forgiveness and expanding the Connecticut Student Loan Repayment Program.
- Karen Griffiths made the motion, and it was seconded by Sajjad Raza.
- The Task Force voted to accept recommendation two.
- Bernadette Mele asked for a motion of acceptance for recommendation three which is about grant funding.
- Matthew Green made the motion, and it was seconded by Sajjad.

- The Task Force voted to accept recommendation three.
- Bernadette Mele asked for a motion of acceptance for recommendation four which is about recruitment.
- Adam Kaye made the motion, and it was seconded by Sajjad Raza.
- The Task Force voted to accept recommendation four.
- Bernadette Mele asked for a motion of acceptance for recommendation five which is about an interstate licensure compact.
- Karen Griffiths asked if she can further comment on the recommendation,
- Bernadette Mele answered that she could.
- Rep. McCarthy-Vahey commented that for procedure they will need to have a motion to discuss the item they are voting on. She motioned to discuss recommendation five and Bernadette Mele seconded. She clarified that the motion gives the Task Force the opportunity to discuss whether members would like to move forward.
- Karen Griffiths asked Rep. McCarthy-Vahey if this recommendation should be something recommended at this point or is it something that the legislature will deal with anyway. She added that she doesn't want to muddy the waters and recommend this, have it passed, while other recommendations fail.
- Rep. McCarthy-Vahey added that a fiscal note attached to a bill makes it more difficult to pass and that the compacts that they passed have had none to limited cost to the State. She stated that compacts are specific to each industry as they would have to ask to join a particular compact which would have different language to other compacts. She shared an example of a previous compact that the legislature worked on, and it had clear support from stakeholders while this situation seems to be different. She stated that questions she would ask would be exactly which specific compact the recommendation is for and does the compact already exist. She added that if they would want to move forward with legislation then they will need more details.
- Karen Griffiths asked Rep. McCarthy-Vahey if it would be better for this recommendation to be worked on by their own separate fields rather than the Task Force dictating for their three modalities.
- Rep. McCarthy-Vahey added that more specificity is helpful and that recommendations coming from their fields or organizations could be

considered as pieces of protentional legislation. She stated that they are limited in writing compacts due to the complexity of writing them. She answered that if they do not move forward with this recommendation then it doesn't preclude any other group from bringing it forward.

- Bernadette Mele asked if there was any further discussion.
- Adam Kaye asked to see the language of the recommendation.
- Matthew Green believes that they are on the same page that compacts could help people that want to move in and out of states and that wouldn't probably help them in the long term. He stated that he isn't for, or against either option but believes that they must make a decision on this recommendation. He added that the issues raised about travelers are correct, but they fill that double-edged sword of needing a worker. He asked the Task Force if they wanted to make the recommendations long term and leave out the short-term fixes.
- Bernadette Mele agrees with Matthew Green that this recommendation is more of a short-term fix then a long-term solution.
- Rep. McCarthy-Vahey commented that she hears their issues about travelers. She added that Connecticut for the past three years has had positive population trends, and it would make it easier for out-of-state licensed professionals to become employed. She stated that Connecticut would have to agree to whatever compact is proposed and that she is hesitant about supporting the idea as she doesn't know the potential barriers they will need to overcome.
- Karen Griffiths stated that the respiratory therapy state professional organization is pushing for compact licensure separately from the Task Force. She mentioned that Sajjad Raza would be more informed on that as he sat on the board. She added that she will vote against the recommendation because she feels like it will complicate things as they don't have enough information from each of the professions even though she agrees with Matthew Green that it could help in the short-term. She believes that if it is important to their professions, then they should work on it separately from the Task Force.
- Sajjad Raza stated that he has no information to share about the licensure compact.
- Bernadette Mele added that she doesn't know of any compact licensure that exists for radiologic technologists or nuclear medicine technologists. She asked if they would like to move forward with this recommendation.

- Rep. McCarthy-Vahey commented that for voting purposes Bernadette Mele could not put this recommendation to a vote as it seems like there is not enough support and recommends taking no action. She added that the discussion was very important for her as Co-Chair of the Public Health Committee and she understands that it may differ among the professional groups. She suggested to hold off on voting for the recommendation because of the differences between the three groups.
- Bernadette Mele thanked Rep. McCarthy-Vahey and commented that during the Subgroup meeting this recommendation was something they didn't come to an agreement on as well but wanted to forward the recommendation because a group supported it. She added that she does not want to act on the recommendation. She asked the Task Force if they agree with accepting the four recommendations that they have voted on.
- The Task Force members agreed.
- Bernadette Mele stated the four recommendations that the Task Force has agreed to are going to be about student loans and tuition assistance, loan forgiveness, grant funding, and recruitment. She added that the final report will be written by Bernadette Mele, Matthew Green and Karen Griffiths. She announced that the next meeting will be on December 12<sup>th</sup>, at 10:30 AM.

### III. Adjournment

- Bernadette Mele asked for a motion to adjourn. Adam Kaye motioned to adjourn, and it was seconded by Karen Griffiths.
- The meeting adjourned at 2:07 PM.