



NEW JERSEY SENATE

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TRANSPORTATION
HEALTH, HUMAN SERVICES
& SENIOR CITIZENS

DISTRICT OFFICES:
14-25 PLAZA ROAD
P.O. Box 398
FAIR LAWN, NJ 07410
TEL: (201) 703-9779
FAX: (201) 703-8127
35 SOUTH WASHINGTON AVENUE
BERGENFIELD, NJ 07621
TEL: (201) 374-2205
FAX: (201) 374-2205
SenGordon@njleg.org

February 28, 2014

Patricia Ann Murphy, PhD, APN
President, NJ Board of Nursing
124 Halsey Street
Newark, NJ 07101

Dear Dr. Murphy,

As members of the Senate Health, Human Services and Senior Citizens Committee, we would like to formally express our concern over the excessive delays experienced by individuals applying to the Board of Nursing to become Certified Home Health Aides.

Individuals seeking a career as a Certified Home Health Aide must first complete a training program approved by the Board of Nursing. The cost of training ranges between approximately \$500-\$700 per student. While many home health agencies cover the cost of training, individual students can also be charged. While they are in training, they have their fingerprints taken so that they are able to work when their training has commenced. When training and testing are completed, their application is sent to the Board of Nursing for certification approval. Without certification, they are unable to work as Home Health Aides in New Jersey. ***Most unfortunately, it has come to our attention that applications are languishing at the Board of Nursing for 10-12 weeks before certification is conditionally approved.***

We appreciate the staffing shortages and escalating workloads that many public agencies, and their employees, currently endure. However, asking applicants to wait for certification approval for 10-12 weeks is unacceptable.

As I'm sure you are aware, home health aides receive low wages, few, if any, benefits and

February 28, 2014

Page 2 of 2

more often than not, struggle to support themselves. They are also often the first group to suffer loss of hours and wages in difficult economic times. The vast majority of students entering this career are minority women, seeking an opportunity to better themselves and their families through a fulfilling profession. They already forfeit the opportunity to earn a living while training for this profession; forcing them to wait an additional 10-12 weeks without an income causes severe financial hardship. Far too often, they are forced to find other employment, wasting their time, energy, and scarce resources. Investments by reputable agencies are also lost. Worse still, individuals in need of home care must turn to unqualified caretakers or go without care. This situation undoubtedly leads to a poorer quality of life for students and consumers, as well as economic hardships for the individuals and agencies involved.

As legislators, we also must question what economic impact this has on the State's budget directly. In an effort to use Medicaid dollars more efficiently, we strive to deliver care at home whenever possible. This way, we keep as many residents as possible out of more expensive nursing homes, thus improving their quality of life while saving limited state and federal funds. However, if we are not able to provide adequate in-home services, many individuals will be driven, unnecessarily, to nursing care institutions, and in turn, waste valuable resources.

Staffing shortages at the Board of Nursing are certainly a valid concern, and require long term solutions. However, in the interest of time, we sincerely hope that an interim solution to the lengthy certification approval process can be achieved. We understand that the Home Care Council of New Jersey has offered to help the Board of Nursing and the Division of Consumer Affairs to obtain the resources necessary to alleviate these excessive wait times. We would also be happy to work with you to help find a solution.

The hardships experienced by Home Health Aide students are very real. We ask that you do everything in your power to immediately address the prolonged approval process. We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Senator Bob Gordon
Senator Joseph Vitale, Chairman
Senator Fred Madden, Vice Chairman
Senator Richard Codey
Senator Robert Singer
Senator Jim Whelan

cc: Eric Kanefsky, Director, Division of Consumer Affairs