

Testimony of

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*Supporting
House Bill 5427: An Act Expanding the Debt-Free Community College Program
to Include Workforce Development and Continuing Education Programs*

Higher Education & Employment Advancement Committee
March 10, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this important bill.

On behalf of the Community Health Center Association of Connecticut (CHC/ACT), and its sixteen member community health centers, I want to thank the Committee for its dedication to addressing our state's workforce challenges. Connecticut's community health centers serve more than 452,000 people each year, providing medical, behavioral health, dental, and some specialty care in hundreds of locations across the state. In addition to providing this high-quality care, they are also significant employers, with about 5,000 employees across the state.

Along with our health centers, CHC/ACT is deeply committed to providing access to high quality care for all, and the most important elements of meeting that commitment are our staff members, from the front desk to our medical assistants, nurses, physician assistants, social workers, dentists, and doctors.

We thank the Committee for raising this bill to assist our organization and others in addressing persistent workforce recruitment and retention challenges.

Since the inception of the community health center program in the 1960s, workforce shortages have been a defining obstacle. Today, health care organizations across Connecticut are struggling to recruit and retain staff at every level – from front-desk team members and medical assistants to nurses, physicians, social workers, dental hygienists, billing specialists, human resources directors, and more. These challenges stem from a combination of factors: an aging population, increased consolidation within the health care sector, the rising cost of academic and clinical training, competition from higher-paying retail jobs, and a reduced interest in entering or remaining in health care roles following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Insufficient staffing, of course, limits our ability to provide and expand access to essential health care services.

CHC/ACT is pleased to support this bill, which has the potential to create meaningful pathways for individuals to enter or advance in high-need health care careers, including medical assisting, dental hygiene, pharmacy technology, and IT support. Accelerated programs like these open doors to the health care field and also offer career-ladder opportunities that help individuals grow into new and higher-skilled roles. Career growth is a key factor in employee satisfaction and retention.

Community health centers stand ready to serve as partners in designing these programs and in offering job placements for program graduates.

Thank you for your consideration and your hard work on behalf of our great state. Please feel free to reach out with any questions: dpolun@chcact.org or 860.667.7820.