



Your Voice for Public Health

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Testimony in Support of HB2678 to establish a nursing advisory board within the Executive Office of Health and Human Services

July 14, 2005

The Public Health Nursing Section of the Massachusetts Public Health Association represents nurses practicing population-based nursing, including nurses working in municipal and the state health departments, school nurses and nurses in academia. We are here today to support House Bill 2678 to establish a nursing advisory board within the Executive Office of Health and Human Services.

There are many challenges facing health care today, not the least of which is the shortage of nurses in all settings, including community-based settings. The challenges of recruitment and retention require a multifaceted approach involving both the private and public sectors. We believe that a nursing advisory board with formal channels to both the governor's office and the legislature will ensure that the results of research and experience in nursing practice and workforce development will be heard and used to develop public policies that support nursing and its contribution to the health of our communities.

While we support this bill, we are concerned that public health nurses will not be represented by this advisory board. Public health nurses work in our communities to promote health, prevent disease and are part of the first line of defense against such emerging threats as pandemic influenza and bioterrorism. Public health nurses, while making up a small proportion of all nurses, make up the largest group of public health workers and are important care providers for a variety of underserved populations. They provide invaluable services to our families and our communities, and yet they are often overlooked when addressing the issue of nursing shortages.

Many public health nurses are reaching retirement age, fewer people are entering nursing, and of those that do, fewer still are able to work for the lower wages paid to public health nurses. We must ensure that strategies to address the overall nursing shortage include a focus on the unique role of public health nurses and the need to increase the supply of public health nurses.

We ask you to amend House Bill 2678 to include specific representation of public health and school nurses on the nursing advisory committee and we strongly encourage passage of this bill in its amended form.

**Submitted by: Donna Lazorik, RN, MS, CS, Chair, Public Health Nursing Section
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