

# PAPNA

## Pennsylvania Association of Practical Nursing Administrators

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**Testimony before the  
House Professional Licensure Committee  
House Bills 2715 and 2716  
Title "Nurse" Protection**

**Presented by  
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Pennsylvania Association of Practical Nursing Administrators

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Good morning Chairman Sturla, Chairman Adolph and members of the Committee. My name is Patty Knecht and I am President of the Pennsylvania Association of Practical Nursing Administrators (PAPNA). I am a master's prepared registered nurse and currently the Director of the Practical Nursing Program at the Center for Arts and Technology in Coatesville Pennsylvania. As a practicing RN of 28 years who has focused on practical nursing education and administration for the last two decades, I am here today to provide background information and answer questions from the Committee related to House Bills 2715 & 2716, legislation introduced by Rep. John Siptroth.

PAPNA is a statewide membership association representing the professional interests of Pennsylvania's administrators of practical nursing programs. A primary purpose of the association is to serve as a resource to organizations regarding the practice and education of practical nurses. Since an organization of LPNs does not currently exist in Pennsylvania the PAPNA Association plays a key role in supporting activities that protect the interest of LPNs, their job role and relationship with their RN nursing colleagues. Safe high quality patient care is the overall goal.

As you probably are aware, the nursing shortage no longer looms in the future, but instead we are living it every day. The Supply and Demand Report released by the Pennsylvania Center for Health Careers in 2006 predicts a shortage of 16,000 RNs and 4,100 LPNs by the year 2010. In times of workforce shortages, it is common for new ideas to emerge as problems are complex and quick solutions are often sought. Consequently, bandaids are applied quickly and both the profession and the public can suffer. The legislation, as stated in House Bills 2715 & 2716,

would protect the use of the title "nurse" by allowing only a Registered Nurse or a Licensed Practical Nurse to use or be identified by the title "nurse" in the scope of their professional duties. House Bill 2715 amends the Professional Nurse Law to protect the title "nurse," while House Bill 2716 amends the Practical Nurse Law to do the same.

This legislation would prevent profit minded health care entities amongst others from substituting minimally or even non-educated health care providers for licensed nurses, unbeknownst to the public. The major employment market of LPNs in Pennsylvania is the continuing care setting working primarily with the elderly, who are often in a vulnerable state. It is critical that the public is assured that a nurse is represented by an individual who has attended a state board of nursing approved educational setting, successfully passed the national licensing exam and holds a valid nursing license. This assures the rigor of the educational process, both in theory and clinical practice. In addition, the LPN is bound to adhere to the rules and regulations contained in PA Code Title 49, Chapter 21, Subchapter B. These rules and regulations are promulgated and enacted with supporting evidence and public and stakeholder comment. As a result, the public is protected against incompetent and possibly fraudulent practitioners. If the title of nurse is not protected by regulation, the public will lose a sense of security and confidence in the nursing profession. Nurses are America's most honest and ethical professionals according to a recent Gallup survey. Nearly 80 percent of the annual poll's participants ranked nurses "very high" or "high" for honesty and ethics. Nurses have been in the winner's circle before. They have traditionally ranked at or near the top of the list of professionals that the public holds in high regard.

In a time when the health care arena is constantly changing and health care insurance is a heavy weight on the minds of all Pennsylvanians, it is essential that titles such as nurse continue to hold the same meaning they have for several generations. The intent to protect the title "nurse" assures that the public is not erroneously led to believe that a limited or untrained health care worker is a nurse. Thus, they are assured their care and answers to questions during times of great stress, are addressed by a trained and licensed professional. The proliferation of unlicensed health care providers in settings where the LPN is the primary nursing professional or was the primary health care professional is a trend in some areas. These changes are often budgetary in nature. Faculty throughout the Commonwealth express their concern as they hear medical assistants, patient care technicians and others referred to as "the nurse." This reference unfortunately is often made not only by the lay public but also health care colleagues. Clear regulations, which include penalties for utilizing the use of the term "nurse," need to be enacted. This issue is heightened due to the current and continued grim predictions related to the nursing shortage. Many solutions to the shortage and changes in health care are on the horizon. The protection of the title "nurse" will be one step in assuring the solutions implemented are based on evidence and provide for the safety of the public.

Once again I thank the committee for inviting us to provide comments on House Bills 2715 and 2716 and I will address any questions to the best of my knowledge.