

Written Testimony of



Delivered by
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**For a Public hearing on
Temporary Nurse Aides and Credentialia**

**Delivered before the
Senate Health & Human Services
Committee**

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Chairwoman Brooks and members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

I'm Zach Shamborg, the President and CEO of the Pennsylvania Health Care Association. We represent long-term care in Pennsylvania, including nursing homes, personal care homes, and assisted living communities.

We represent the providers, the residents they serve, and the caregivers - our healthcare heroes.

This is not the first time we've testified on the troubling workforce issues affecting Pennsylvania's long-term care continuum. In fact, just two months ago, we testified before the House Aging Committee on this very topic. And before that, in the summer of 2021, we testified before members of this committee on workforce and proposed new staffing minimums.

What's troubling is that the workforce shortage in long-term care has not improved in this time; in fact, that 'shortage' is now a full-blown crisis. And it is having a direct impact on access to care throughout the state.

We don't use the phrases "access to care" or "crisis" lightly, either. And that's because we have the data to prove this is a crisis. We have shared the results of our most recent provider survey with the committee, which includes these troubling trends:

- Some facilities are turning away 20 vulnerable senior citizens a month because they don't have enough workers;
- The average nursing home waitlist – yes, waitlist – has eight people or more;
- And nearly 50% of respondents say they have, on average, more than 30 empty beds – just sitting in their facilities – because of the workforce crisis.

But what if I told you there was a solution?

Since the creation of the Temporary Nurse Aide (TNA) position during the COVID-19 pandemic, thousands of caring, concerned, and committed Pennsylvanians have stepped up to take a course that enabled them to join the frontlines in Pennsylvania nursing homes.

But as the name of the position states, it's only temporary. It became the first step for an individual to enter a career ladder with plenty of opportunity to climb and provide care for our elderly population, not only today, but as that population grows over the next 10-20 years. The second step is to test and certify those individuals as full-time CNAs, and that's where the challenge lies.

Just two weeks ago, nursing homes were officially forbidden from hiring new TNAs due to the expiration of the federal CMS waiver. All remaining TNAs – of which there are still thousands – must successfully pass the skills and written portions of the state nurse aide examination by October 6, and TNAs who do not pass by that date cannot continue to work.

In approximately 14 months, nearly 2,500 TNAs went through an attestation process and received training in a facility, according to the Department of Health's data. Less than 50% of those workers were able to successfully schedule their certification test. With the October expiration of the TNA waiver

looming, the amount of TNAs that were scheduled to be certified in 14 months now need to be scheduled in the next four months.

And that's where Credentia comes in. It is the job of Credentia to provide the opportunities for testing and certification to these prospective full-time employees.

We aren't here to point fingers. We are here to find a solution and address this problem, because our members are telling us that their TNAs are simply giving up. They'd rather leave our field and find a job in another industry than attempt to get certified and work against the barriers and burdens that state government and Credentia have constructed.

Back to the survey...half of the respondents revealed they are experiencing challenges or hardships with Credentia and the TNA to CNA conversion. One provider recently shared that 431 TNAs are waiting to test. Others revealed that their TNAs are being forced to drive 2-3 hours to get to a testing site, and upon arrival, many are finding out the test isn't being administered because of a lack of instructors or unexplained closures. For those trying to schedule tests — if the Credentia website is working — they are now being told that the only open test dates are in 2023.

Communication has been poor. Customer service is nonexistent. Accessibility is a struggle. And progress seems to be stalled.

With the clock ticking to get TNAs tested, we're recommending the state consider leveraging certified nurses in the National Guard to serve as the instructors for these tests to improve accessibility. Our members have already reached out about being a test site to create more testing opportunities – but they don't hear back. We are working to provide solutions, but they must be followed through.

We need this program to work. Without our TNAs, our workforce crisis worsens. We can't do this without them.

Recently, Senators Ward and Brooks introduced a co-sponsor memo to make the TNA position permanent. It would be called a 'PCA', or Personal Care Attendant, and this will certainly be a legislative priority for PHCA and our members moving forward. While it doesn't appear we can stop CMS from eliminating the TNA position on October 6th, we can advocate for the TNA role to become permanent in PA.

A PHCA member shared yesterday that the feedback in Pennsylvania on Credentia and testing remains: "it is what it is, and we try to work through it."

In the third-oldest state, in terms of our population, in the country, that's simply not good enough.

Again, we ask for your support today. Let's get this right.

Thank you.