

Testimony of Randy L. Lindner, MHSA, CAE
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Good Morning Senator Kerry, Speaker Gingrich and members of the Commission. On behalf of the National Association of Boards of Examiners of Long Term Care Administrators (NAB), thank you for the opportunity to be here today to present to you the NAB's concerns regarding the recruitment and retention of long term care administrators.

My name is Randy Lindner, and I am the Executive Director of the NAB. The NAB represents regulatory boards and agencies in the 50 states and the District of Columbia responsible for the licensure of nursing home administrators and assisted living administrators in those states that require licensure. The NAB supports state boards and agencies in carrying out their federal or state mandate to license administrators through the establishment of educational and practice standards and entry level licensure examinations.

Since 1998 the number of examinations administered to candidates seeking initial licensure as nursing home administrators has declined by more than 40%. Currently approximately 1,000 first time candidates annually seek licensure as nursing home administrators. Not all 1,000 of these candidates go on to become the administrator of record in a skilled nursing facility. Some candidates go to work in assisted living facilities or continuing care retirement communities, others are consultants, academicians, corporate executives with provider organizations or allied health professionals who seek licensure as a validation of their knowledge base in the field.

Considering the number of skilled nursing facilities (currently around 16,500) that require a licensed administrator of record, the demographics of an aging profession and high attrition rates, we will not be able to meet the demand for licensed administrators in the future.

There are many reasons for the decline in recruitment and retention. Some have roots that go back to 1965 when President Johnson signed into law the social security act which established the Medicare and Medicaid programs.

The Federal Mandate for administrator licensure which was part of an amendment to the Social Security act offered by Senator Edward M. Kennedy in 1967 stated that a state plan for medical assistance must include a state program for licensing of administrators and nursing homes. States were given the responsibility for licensing and for establishment of standards for licensing. The result of this mandate is that today, we have 51 different standards for initial licensure, and for licensees who cross state borders to seek new employment opportunities or transfers.

Most state standards include both an educational and training requirement commonly know as an Administrator in Training Program (AIT). Educational requirements range from a high school education to a baccalaureate degree. Only one state, Florida, requires a baccalaureate degree specifically in long term care administration. AIT requirements range from 0 hours in a hand full of states, to 2,000 hours in others. As a result of this wide range of standards, education and training varies significantly from state to state, and mobility is difficult. For example, an administrator crossing borders usually has to meet the requirements of the state in which they seek licensure, which may be significantly higher than their initial licensure requirement. Even though they have practiced successfully for a number of years, they may be required to seek additional education and enter into an AIT program.

In many cases today, AIT programs are not funded by the state or the facility. For those that are funded the pay is generally low. Thus a college graduate may be required to work in an AIT program for six to 12 months with little or no pay. For a licensee seeking to cross borders,

individuals already working in the field who aspire to become administrators or someone interested in a mid-career profession change, making these transitions without pay is difficult. With families to support and other financial obligations, the barriers are prohibitive. For college graduates who have many career choices and are already carrying the burden of costly college educations, working without pay is not an attractive career choice.

The same problems are being repeated today with the establishment of state licensure requirements for assisted living administrators. Although there is not currently a federal requirement for licensure, more and more states are establishing regulatory requirements for education, training, certification or licensure of assisted living administrators with each state's standards being different.

The NAB's exam candidate statistics show that 70% of candidates have previous work experience in the long term care field. Many college graduates seeking careers in long term care have had previous experience in caring for an elderly relative or working in the field. Some are from other allied health professions. These individuals present our best opportunity for recruitment as administrators, yet there are no financial resources to support them in meeting the requirements for licensure or to support a career path toward administration.

Those who become licensed administrators face significant challenges in being successful. It is frightening to think that a new licensee with a high school or college degree can complete a training program, pass an exam, and immediately become the senior manager of a complex health care organization serving an increasingly frail resident population. Most facilities cannot afford to have an assistant administrator which would provide for a mentoring situation. Thus for most administrators, it is baptism by fire. In addition, many new licensees end up in the most troubled facilities because they are the least attractive and have available openings. The

result in many cases is frustration, disappointment and/or failure. A premature end to a career in long term care administration.

Even for those who are successful, the challenges of working in the profession are many. The negative public perception of nursing homes, a punitive regulatory environment, exposure to personal legal liability and strained financial and human resources, result in a less than rewarding career experience. We fail these individuals by not adequately supporting and preparing them to be leaders in their profession.

The state legal environment in which licensees are regulated is also strained. Many state boards and agencies are under funded and under staffed. In many states licensure fees become part of the states general fund with inadequate funding being appropriated back to the board or agency. The trend in recent years has been a shift from autonomous boards to umbrella agencies. The result being that licensure has become more an administrative task rather than a responsibility of public protection. Several states have sunset their regulatory boards in favor of an agency role, thus agency staff with little knowledge of the profession make licensure and disciplinary decisions, rather than a board representative of the profession balanced by a consumer perspective.

Because licensure records are held by each state, there currently is not a national registry of the profession. A registry would support research to identify education and training needs, track trends in recruitment and retention, identify attributes that contribute to successful leadership, and the ability to predict supply and demand trends. There has been very little research funded on the profession of long term care administration.

I have brought before you today many challenges that are contributing to the decline in the recruitment and retention of long term care administrators. On behalf of the NAB I would like to request your consideration of the following recommendations:

- Development and establishment of common licensure standards for nursing home and assisted living administrators in partnership with the profession and the provider community.
- Review and establish a legal environment and funding mechanisms that assure that state licensure programs can carry out their federal mandate of public protection.
- Establish funding to support Administrator in Training candidates, and career path development for employees of long term care facilities.
- Establish funding to develop and maintain a national registry of the profession and to support research.

Thank you for allowing me to present this testimony to you today. As in any organization, long term care leadership is essential to the continued enhancement of quality care for America's residents in long term care facilities. Your commitment to address the challenges that face the profession is critical to assuring that we have well prepared leaders for the future. I thank you for your dedication and contribution to assuring quality long term care. We look forward to working with the commission to achieve these goals.