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Testimony of Dr. Scott Walters, M.D.
On behalf of the
CT Dermatology and Dermatologic Surgery Society
CT ENT Society
CT Society of Eye Physicians
CT Urology Society
In Strong Support of SB96

AN ACT ESTABLISHING A WORKING GROUP TO ENHANCE PHYSICIAN RECRUITMENT IN THE STATE.

Good Morning Sen. Abrams, Rep. Steinberg, Sen. Somers, Rep. Petit and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee. My name is Scott Walters, M.D. and I am a board certified ophthalmologist and retina specialist practicing in Hartford, CT. I am a Board Member of the Connecticut Society of Eye Physicians and I am here today on behalf of over 1000 physicians practicing in this state from the above specialty medical physicians to speak in strong support of SB96 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A WORKING GROUP TO ENHANCE PHYSICIAN RECRUITMENT IN THE STATE.

Connecticut is my home, and it is special. We have an invigorating 4 season climate. We have world class universities, outstanding healthcare, and a vibrant arts and entertainment scene. We have easy access to the ocean, the mountains and the rich history of America's birthplace. We have our challenges, of course, but it should be easy to recruit and retain new physicians to choose Connecticut as a place to practice and raise their families, right? Unfortunately, list after list of desirable places to practice Medicine place Connecticut near the bottom – one of the least desirable states in the nation.

When we think about physicians and hospitals, we first think of the essential services they provide enhancing health and quality of life. But we must remember that the healthcare system is a very significant part of Connecticut's overall economy. Connecticut MUST act now to ensure we can supply the physicians necessary to care for the needs of our aging population and to continue to drive the state's economy.

Physicians' impact on the economy is enormous. A recent study by the Connecticut State Medical Society shows the magnitude of that contribution:

- **50,759** direct jobs are supported by physicians
- **120,759** total jobs are supported by the healthcare industry
- **11.6** jobs are supported by EACH physician
- **\$24.1** Billion in economic activity is generated by healthcare
- **9.4%** of the Gross State Product is directly related to physicians
- **\$13.6** Billion are provided by physicians in wages and benefits.
- **\$1.1** Billion state and local tax is related to physician activity

More than 10,000 physicians provide primary and specialty care to the people of Connecticut in a variety of settings. Of that number, only 15% are under the age of 40, but about 1/3 are over the age of 60. Unfortunately, the impact of the aging physician population is accelerated as many Connecticut physicians nearing the usual age of retirement are opting for early retirement or fleeing our state. For many of the same reasons, young doctors choose not to come to Connecticut. It is projected that by 2025 – 6 short years away – there will be a shortage of 90,000 physicians in the United States. And for reasons we will explain, unless the current trend is reversed, Connecticut will be disproportionately affected by this shortage.

There are currently three medical schools in Connecticut that award degrees in Medicine and offer post-doctoral residency training. They produce hundreds of new doctors and specialists each year. Unfortunately, although we do an excellent job of training these young doctors, most choose to leave after their training is complete. Consider these facts:

- Connecticut ranks 21st in total residents and fellows in accredited programs and 36th among public granting institutions
- Connecticut is well below the state median (38.5%) in physicians retained from undergraduate medical education
- Connecticut ranks 41st in retaining those we train (a mere 19.2%)!
- Connecticut is well below the state median (44.9%) of physicians retained from Graduate Medical Education.
- Connecticut ranks 45th in retaining Graduate Medical Education students (35%).
- Combined, Connecticut ranks 43rd in total retention.

While there is no single factor that accounts for our difficulties attracting and retaining young doctors, an examination of the business and legal environment in Connecticut reveals a plethora of issues that cement Connecticut's position near the bottom of the list of desirable States in which to practice medicine. Consider the following:

Lack of incentives for young physicians - Connecticut does not offer support, programs, incentives, or assistance to keep the physicians we train in the state and entice others to establish their practices in the state. Programs for student loan forgiveness and forbearance for commitment to practice in certain communities or locations for specific periods of time have proven successful elsewhere.

Medical Liability Environment - Connecticut continues to have some of the highest malpractice settlements and awards, and some of the highest liability insurance rates in the country. In addition, information on closed medical liability claims provided by the Connecticut Insurance Department (CID) as required by PA 05-275, demonstrate the cost and impact of the tort system continues to rise.

A Highly Concentrated Insurance Marketplace – Connecticut's highly concentrated health insurance market with only a handful of payors prevents physicians from engaging in fair and equitable negotiations with insurers, with physicians often faced with "take it or leave it" contracts.

Certificate of Need - While most states continue to remove the burdens of Certificate of Need Laws (CON), Connecticut continues to have some of the most stringent in the country. This runs against Federal Trade Commission recommendations that the burdens of CON be lifted.

Industry Specific Taxes - Issues such as provider taxes on ambulatory services, overall licensing costs, and most recently Ambulatory Surgery Center taxation impact retention and attractability.

The continued “devaluing” of the medical license - Connecticut has some of the most expansive scopes of practice for non-physicians. In many cases, providers viewed as “less expensive” alternatives drive down the value of medicine and increase physician frustration. To further add to the frustration, the scope review process, created to place the scope expansion requests under the auspices of the DPH, thus freeing the legislature from the burden of endless scope determinations, is now routinely by-passed when the petitioning group is either dissatisfied with the DPH review decision, or simply wants to attempt to fast-track a new scope expansion.

All these factors, and many more, need thoughtful and open discussion, with the goal of finding solutions to the current toxic environment that has placed Connecticut at the bottom of the list of physician choices. Medical practices are business entities struggling to survive in a state which is not known for being business friendly. We must identify ways and encourage methods to successfully attract new physicians to come to Connecticut, and more importantly, retain those we train and educate.

I strongly urge this committee to support the creation of a working group to examine these issues, before it is too late.