

Joint Testimony of

David Hunn

**Executive Director
Northern Virginia Workforce Investment Board**

And

Gerry Hofler

**Special Assistant to the President for Workforce
Northern Virginia Community College**

On

**Addressing Workforce Needs at the Regional Level:
Innovative Public and Private Partnerships**

To

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Subcommittee on Employment and Workplace Safety**

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Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member Isakson and distinguished members of the Employment and Workplace Safety Sub-Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today about an innovative partnership in Northern Virginia that is addressing a regional health care workforce challenge. We are David Hunn, Executive Director of the Northern Virginia Workforce Investment Board and Gerry Hofler, Special Assistant to Northern Virginia Community College President, Dr. Robert G. Templin, Jr. for workforce and the Project Director of NoVaHealthFORCE.

NoVaHealthFORCE, a consortium of health care providers, higher educational leaders, businesses, economic development authorities, and the Northern Virginia Workforce Investment Board, represents the first time the regional health care workforce shortage has been addressed by a broad spectrum of involved constituents in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

The Northern Virginia Workforce Investment Board (NVWIB) was established in 2000, with a commitment to providing quality workforce development services on behalf of Northern Virginia residents. In 2002, the *SkillSource* Group, Inc. (*SkillSource*) was created as the non-profit entity of the NVWIB with a mandate for fiscal oversight and resource development in support of the programs and services of the NVWIB. *SkillSource*'s mission is to catalyze a world class, globally competitive business environment in Northern Virginia with the goal to offer world-class preparation to every Northern Virginia resident at its five (5) One-Stop Employment Centers, known as *SkillSource* Centers. The *SkillSource* Centers had a record number of adult client visits in FY 2011, recording over 100,000 jobseeker visits. The *SkillSource* One-Stop Employment Centers serve over 1.9 million residents and thousands of businesses in Fairfax, Loudoun and Prince William counties and the cities of Fairfax, Falls Church, Manassas and Manassas Park. The Northern Virginia Workforce Area is one of fifteen local workforce areas in the Commonwealth of Virginia, overseen by the Virginia Community College System (VCCS) as the State Workforce Investment Act Fiscal Agent.

The Northern Virginia region has grown rapidly during the past two decades to become a major metropolitan job center, with 1.5 million total jobs widely distributed in multiple employment sectors such as information technology, professional services, education/health care, leisure/hospitality, retail, construction, and financial services, and government (Federal, state, and local). Unemployment in the Northern Virginia Workforce Area remains relatively low – 4.5% versus a Virginia unemployment rate of 6.2% and a national rate of 8.5% (seasonally adjusted for December 2011). New job growth in Northern Virginia is projected to lead all local jurisdictions in the Greater Washington Region through 2020 and local employers in various industries have reported difficulties in identifying and hiring skilled workers for their available positions.

Founded in 2003, NoVaHealthFORCE commissioned PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP to empirically measure the scope and examine the impact of the regional nursing and allied health

care worker shortage in Northern Virginia. The study, financed by five regional healthcare institutions and the Northern Virginia Workforce Investment Board, identified critical shortages of health care workers in 24 job categories. The original study was updated in 2008 and projected that Northern Virginia's estimated current 3,000 health care worker shortage is projected to explode to more than 17,000 by 2020, without intervention.

To date, the NoVaHealthFORCE outcomes have included:

- A 33% increase in educational capacity in the region's undergraduate nursing programs from 2006-2010;
- A 25% increase in the number of nursing undergraduates from 2006-2010, with about 80% remaining in the Greater Washington Region to work;
- A catalyst for development of new curricula in Radiation Oncology and Ultra-Sonography by way of a U.S. Department of Labor grant in 2007;
- A catalyst for approximately \$10 million in grants from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Kaiser Permanente of the Mid-Atlantic, and the U.S. Department of Education to increase capacity in Health Information Management curricula in 2010.

In 2005 NoVaHealthFORCE convened an inaugural meeting of the region's health care CEO's and college and university presidents. Collectively, they pledged to cooperatively establish a long term strategy to address the shortage. Now known as the CEO Roundtable, this group meets twice each year to identify and discuss issues and develop strategy. The group consists of the following health care providers: Inova Health System, Dewitt Army Health Care Network, Virginia Hospital Center, Prince William Health System, Sentara Potomac Hospital, Kaiser Permanente of the Mid-Atlantic, and Reston Hospital Center. The region's colleges and universities are George Mason University, Marymount University, Northern Virginia Community College, Old Dominion University, and Shenandoah University. The Northern Virginia Workforce Investment Board serves as the fiscal agent for NoVaHealthFORCE.

NoVaHealthFORCE advocates that the solution to the local healthcare worker shortage must be the establishment of a long-term, business-driven, sustainable strategy. The Northern Virginia community must recognize that the healthcare worker shortage is more than a hospital problem and it affects all aspects of economic and community life.

This well-established group is led by Dr. Robert G. Templin, Jr., President of Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA). NOVA is the second largest community college in the United States, and, as one of the 23 colleges in the Virginia Community College System, it is the largest higher education institution in the Commonwealth of Virginia. NOVA opened its sixth campus,

the Medical Education Campus, in 2004. It is solely dedicated to nursing and allied health education and is the only specialized community college campus in the Commonwealth.

The release of the PricewaterhouseCoopers study was accompanied by an agenda which detailed specific actions to be taken by the local public and private stakeholders. Eight work groups comprised of approximately 100 subject matter experts from education, local government, and the health care community conceived a fourteen step action plan centered on the following three goals:

1. Increasing capacity within the healthcare education and training system.
2. Develop and sustain an ongoing supply of persons interested in health care careers.
3. Nurture Innovation.

In 2006, through the efforts of the original steering committee and the Northern Virginia Workforce Investment Board, NoVaHealthFORCE was successful in leveraging the health care providers' original investment to obtain a \$1.5 million grant from the Virginia General Assembly for the expansion of nursing education and nursing faculty. Matching funds were provided by the region's health care providers. NoVaHealthFORCE has distributed these funds from the region's health care institutions to five college and university nursing programs since 2006.

This additional funding allowed each of the region's colleges and universities to target their niche in nursing education without competitive overtones, resulting in a 33% increase in nursing student admissions in the Northern Virginia region since 2006. This cooperative effort has spawned a variety of creative educational ladders among the institutions, including study options such as accelerated traditional curriculums, accelerated inter-school pathways to advanced nursing degrees, and on-line education which will increase the number of nursing graduates. For example, the creation of a program, Momentum 2+1 enables a nursing student to enter NOVA and work toward two Associate Degrees, one in General Studies and one in Nursing. Upon completion, this student is automatically accepted to George Mason University to complete the Bachelors in Nursing in one additional year or a Master's in Nursing in two additional years.

The nursing education expansion project has been funded by the Commonwealth of Virginia every year since 2006 and the region's health care providers have more than matched the General Assembly funding each year. To date, Virginia General Assembly funding totals \$2,359,825 and the region's health care providers have contributed \$2,454,350. New this year has been the establishment of two graduate fellowships at George Mason University for Ph.D. nursing students. Upon award of their degree, the fellows will become nursing faculty for one of the region's nursing education programs. These new faculty will help to relieve the teaching shortage in the nursing classroom, which is at least as critical as the shortage at the bedside.

Through the efforts of the CEO Roundtable, NoVAHealthFORCE has also facilitated the development of new diagnostic imaging curricula in Radiation Oncology and Ultra-Sonography. NOVA received a \$1.2 million grant from U.S. Department of Labor in 2007 to expand the region's output of radiation technologists, radiation oncology therapists and sonographers. This effort was heavily supported by the region's healthcare providers. Each health care provider contributed toward a subsidy to better align faculty salaries with the market rate salaries. The healthcare providers also recruited incumbent workers for these curricula and provided tuition assistance. These new funds were instrumental in opening new educational and career ladders in accordance with HealthFORCE's pipeline goal, reflected in the training and career preparation of over 120 new skilled workers to date. These funds also developed a high school bridge program allowing students to begin their preparation for a career in Radiation Technology while still in high school.

NoVaHealthFORCE's interest in Health Information Management (HIM) and Health Information Technology (HIT) was the catalyst for NOVA to apply for and receive approximately \$10 million dollars in grants from the Office of the National Coordinator for HIT of HHS, Kaiser Permanente of the Mid-Atlantic, and the Department of Education.

In summary, the NoVaHealthFORCE initiative has positively impacted the Northern Virginia community by increasing the region's nursing and allied health educational capacity allowing for the filling of health care worker vacancies that will maintain and improve patient care and outcomes in addition to yielding additional tax revenues at the local, state, and federal levels. It has helped to increase access to higher education health care training and has promoted career ladders within the health care industry.

The premise of NoVaHealthFORCE is that no one sector, either private health care providers, Federal, State or local governments, higher educational institutions or the general public can deal with the multiple issues of the skilled healthcare workforce shortage by itself. Rather, through collective action and regional public and private sector leadership, solutions can be carefully developed and implemented to best serve both public and private interests.

More details on NoVAHealthForce can be found on www.novahealthforce.org and Northern Virginia Community College at www.nvcc.edu. Additional information on the Northern Virginia Workforce Investment Board can be reviewed at www.myskillsource.org.