

Honorable Members of the Pennsylvania Senate Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure Committee,

I am grateful for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding the ongoing challenge of nurse licensure delays in Pennsylvania. As a state operations leader overseeing much of the skilled nursing services of BAYADA Home Health Care in Pennsylvania, I am deeply invested in this issue and grateful for your attention to it. I hope my testimony today can shed light on the impact of these delays and offer potential solutions to help address this critical issue.

BAYADA Home Health Care provides nursing, rehabilitative, therapeutic, hospice, and assistive care services to children, adults, and seniors in the comfort of their homes. BAYADA employs more than 29,000 nurses, home health aides, therapists, medical social workers, and other home health care professionals who serve their communities in 23 states from 390 locations. In Pennsylvania, we are the largest home care provider and one of the top 50 employers in the state. We currently employ over 7,000 nurses, 280 of whom have completed our nurse residency program, designed to get new nurses into the field at an accelerated rate after completing a six or eight-week intensive program.

The delays in Pennsylvania's nurse licensure process have been a significant challenge for BAYADA and other healthcare providers in the state. During COVID, it was incredibly challenging; as we know, most state operations were moved online, and people had to work remotely. As a result, BAYADA experienced mass nurse license delays. At one time, over 76 nurses had issues renewing or obtaining their licenses. This issue, though, was limited to the height of the pandemic, but serious issues continue to linger. Our office previously reached out to its state representatives and senators to help resolve individual cases. Still, in recent years, legislators have had little success in helping overcome delays.

Recruiting and retaining nurses is already incredibly difficult due to low reimbursement rates. BAYADA has tried to get creative by implementing reliability bonuses, take-home teams, and, most recently, the nurse residency program I mentioned. Our nurse residency program has been successful in recruiting more nurses. This hybrid program allows us to train new graduate nurses to care for clients needing shift nursing services. It includes additional resources like a coach mentor that will follow the nurse for a year and provide ongoing support. It is the only ANCC-accredited home care residency program in the country. Across BAYADA, we have 680 residents who have graduated from the program, many of which work in Pennsylvania.

This success, however, is only as good as the number of nurses we can get into the program. At one point, we had over 100 nurses waiting for their licenses to begin the nurse residency program. Delphine H, for example, was accepted into BAYADA's program and has been unable to start as she is still awaiting her license that she applied for in December. As a result, when Delphine calls the board to check on her

application status, she reports back with three to four-hour wait times on hold and sometimes never gets a person on the phone.

As a result, nurses are entering the field much slower, if at all, impacting client care. When medically fragile individuals who require shift nursing services cannot receive care at home, there are significant risks to their health and well-being. These individuals often have complex medical needs that require specialized care and attention from trained professionals. Without this care, they may experience complications such as infections or respiratory distress, resulting in unplanned hospitalizations and emergency medical interventions, ultimately costing the state more money. And more importantly, the absence of care can cause a decline in their overall health status and quality of life, leading to long-term consequences.

One of our nurses, Pam G., moved from out of state (Florida), and it took over two months to get her nursing license active in PA. As a result, she was able to start with our Butler County Pediatric Office in December of 2022 but could have started months earlier without the lag time on her license issues.

In addition to client care, license delays cost the state money in lost income tax. For example, my colleague Laura recently got a call from a panicked mother because her nurse had been unable to renew her license, and time was running out. Without a backup nurse available, this family was at risk of having to provide overnight care for their daughter, unable to sleep, and then would miss out on work the next day. In this case, the state would have missed out on revenue from the nurses' and parents' wages until the issue was resolved.

In another example, one of our New Jersey nurses was working to obtain her permanent license after her temporary license was set to expire. Initially, she was granted an extension on her temporary license, but she lost 13 days of work in the spring of 2022 waiting for that temporary license to be processed. She submitted her permanent licensure information well before her license expired in September of 2022. She lost an additional five days of work due to processing delays. Not only are clients impacted by these delays, but Pennsylvania is missing out on income revenues as nurses cannot work.

Nurses in Pennsylvania are experiencing longer wait times for their licenses than in neighboring states. In 2022, the median processing time for an LPN endorsement in Pennsylvania was 126 days, compared to a median of around 50 days in 30 other states. Similarly, the median processing time for an RN endorsement in Pennsylvania is 90 days, compared to a median of about 50 days in 30 states. This delay is causing nurses to seek employment in neighboring states with easier licensing processes, such as New Jersey and Delaware, both members of the Nurse Licensing Compact, leading to a "brain drain" of nurses from Pennsylvania to those states.

For example, another New Jersey nurse transitioned from a temporary license to a permanent one and submitted her documentation well before expiration. Unfortunately,

her license expired, and it took four weeks to process after she had submitted the appropriate documentation. As a result, the nurse needed to travel back to NJ to work under her current and active NJ license to avoid missing out on work. Unfortunately, we have been unable to recruit her back to PA as she now has a steady client in New Jersey she does not wish to leave.

Moreover, recent challenges with issuing 7600 fraudulent nursing transcripts from nursing schools in Florida have only compounded the issue. In addition to the difficulties associated with nurse licensing delays, we have found it very difficult to communicate with the board to detect these fraudulent transcripts and prevent these individuals from providing fraudulent care to our clients, putting them at risk. Other state boards have issued plans and have worked with providers to mitigate this issue. Unfortunately, we have not seen a comprehensive plan in PA and have spent many internal resources to ensure we do not hire an individual with a license obtained fraudulently.

We urge you to address these delays and ensure that nurses can obtain their licenses in a timely and efficient manner. We were grateful that the General Assembly passed legislation allowing Pennsylvania to enter the Nurse Licensure Compact. We encourage the state to provide the additional support needed to get our process approved so we may take full advantage of what the compact has to offer. We also understand that the board has undergone many changes and efforts to modernize and is experiencing its own staffing issues. Therefore, the board must recruit staff to alleviate these backlogs and invest in efficient ways to troubleshoot problems and respond to applicant concerns more expeditiously.

In closing, I would like to express my gratitude for the opportunity to testify and bring attention to the nurse licensure delays in Pennsylvania. As a BAYADA Home Health Care leader, I have seen firsthand the impact these delays have on our clients and our nurses. We are committed to working with you to find solutions to these issues and ensure that the people of Pennsylvania have access to the high-quality healthcare they deserve. Thank you again for your time and consideration, and I look forward to being a part of the solution in the future.

Sincerely,

Ray D'Ambrosio

Regional Director BAYADA Home Health Care