

TECHNOLOGIST SECTION CALLS FOR END TO PROFICIENCY EXAMINATIONS

The Society of Nuclear Medicine (SNM) Technologist Section joined 14 other allied health professional organizations last spring in a coalition letter to the United States (US) Senate Finance Committee urging repeal of Section 1123 of the 1972 Social Security Act. That section required the US Department of Health, Education and Welfare (HEW), now the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), to devise a program to determine the proficiency of allied health professionals who did not meet the certification standards of private sector organizations. These professionals include practical nurses, therapists, laboratory technicians, technologists, cytotechnologists, x-ray technicians, psychiatric technicians, and "other health care technicians."

Originally, Section 1123 was enacted to serve as a grandfather mechanism for those practitioners who did not meet newly established Medicare personnel standards. Section 1123 was also concerned with individuals who had received their professional training in the military during the Viet Nam era. The provision was devised to allow them to meet the new standards and relieve the manpower shortages in the allied health fields in the early 1970s.

The coalition letter, representing over one million health care professionals, questions the current need for continuing this grandfather mechanism, stating that the private sector is now adequately filling the need for certified practitioners in the health professions. The repeal of Section 1123 is attached to the Senate's Catastrophic Care bill (S.1127), and is presently waiting consideration by the full Senate.

In October, the coalition sent a letter to the House Ways and Means Committee supporting the repeal of Section 1123, stating: "The ever-increasing demands on health care professionals, caused by the AIDS epidemic and other diseases, such as Alzheimer's and drug and alcohol abuse, can only be met by assuring adequate and appropriate academic preparation, accompanied by a rigorous private sector certification process. These findings demonstrate that appropriate academic training accompanied by private sector certification plays a significant role in quality assurance and is essential to meet the health care needs of the nation."

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