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Testimony of the American College of Surgeons To The Connecticut Joint Committee on Public Safety and Security February 10th, 2009

Presented by
Kimberly Anne Davis, MD, FACS, FCCM
Connecticut Chair, American College of Surgeons
Committee on Trauma
New Haven, CT

Senator Stillman, Representative Dargan, Members of the Public Safety and Security Committee, For the record my name is Dr. Kimberly Davis, representing the American College of Surgeons and I am here to testify in support of H. B. No. 5893 AN ACT REQUIRING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN EMERGENCY RESPONSE SYSTEM OF VOLUNTEER HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS.

I am the Trauma Medical Director and a practicing trauma/critical care surgeon at Yale-New Haven Hospital. I am also an Associate Professor of Surgery at the Yale School of Medicine, and the Vice Chairman for Clinical Affairs in the Department of Surgery. Currently I serve as the State Chair of the Connecticut Committee on Trauma. I am here in that capacity to testify on behalf of the American College of Surgeons and the College's Committee on Trauma.

The American College of Surgeons is encouraged to see that your committee is considering HB 5893. Last October, our Board of Regents adopted a formal statement (see attached) of support for passage of the Uniform Emergency Volunteer Health Practitioners Act (UEVHPA) in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. We hope that in 2009 the state of Connecticut will become one of the growing number of states adopting this important disaster response legislation.

As the largest surgical organization in the world, with over 70,000 members nationwide and 1,000 in Connecticut, the ACS has a strong history of addressing matters relating to patient care in disaster and trauma settings. Our Committee on Trauma and trauma office work to improve the care of injured and critically ill patients – before, en route to, and during hospitalization. In addition to training courses in emergency care for ambulance personnel, the College sponsors courses for the management and prevention of injuries for trauma specialists as well as for physicians who do not treat trauma victims on a regular basis.



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We also are the organization that verifies trauma centers throughout the United States, helping them to upgrade their trauma care capabilities.

The Committee on Trauma's Ad Hoc Committee on Disaster and Mass Casualty Management plays a major role in ACS efforts to prepare surgeons to provide care in complex disaster situations. It is tasked with:

- Defining the role of surgeons in the planning, rehearsal, and execution of mass casualty management following disasters, including both natural (floods, earthquakes, hurricanes) and man-made (biologic, nuclear, incendiary, chemical, and explosive – "BNICE") events.
- Educating surgeons in the principles of disaster planning, and in logistical considerations, triage, and medical management of mass casualties and
- Serving as a resource for information and support of disaster management efforts and plans at the local, regional and national levels.

In supporting the UEVHPA, the College extends its work in trauma and disaster planning and response. A critical element in this proposal is having trained and qualified surgeons able to enter a state to provide the necessary care when the size and scope of the disaster may be such that the local medical community is completely overwhelmed, or severely incapacitated due to the disaster. The UEVHPA establishes legal guidelines for recognizing other states' licenses for physicians and health care practitioners who volunteer to provide assistance during the time of a declared emergency. Since federal provisions for interstate cooperation do not extend to most private practitioners, the UEVHPA calls for the creation of a registration system that out-of-state practitioners may use either before or during a disaster. Upon successful registration, practitioners are expressly permitted to contribute their professional skills to existing organized disaster efforts.

Physicians are uniquely qualified to assist during disasters. In particular, surgeons, with their training in trauma and critical care, play a major role in our health care community's response to most disaster situations. Properly trained volunteers are critical in such circumstances, when local resources may be overextended.

By enacting HB 5893, the Connecticut legislature can have a positive impact on disaster-response effectiveness. Removing barriers that prohibit licensed surgeons and other qualified responders from traveling across state lines to voluntarily administer medically necessary care during disasters will ensure the citizens of our state access to high-quality surgical services in the event of a crisis.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this issue. Please join us in support of HB 5893.



American College of Surgeons

Statement on the Uniform Emergency Volunteer Health Practitioners Act

This statement was developed by the Board of Governors' Committee on Socioeconomic Issues in collaboration with Operation Giving Back. It was approved by the Board of Governors and by the Board of Regents in October 2008.

BACKGROUND

In 2006, the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws adopted a model bill to address the issue of health care practitioners providing care during a declared emergency in states where they may not be licensed to practice. The Uniform Emergency Volunteer Health Practitioners Act (UEVHPA) was developed in response to the significant legal and licensing barriers to volunteer physicians and health care practitioners traveling to New Orleans, LA and the Gulf Coast in response to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.

In 2007, the American College of Surgeons' Board of Governors' Committee on Socioeconomic Issues and the Executive Committee of the Board of Governors discussed and endorsed the UEVHPA at its annual meeting, and expressed that the Act should be aggressively and vocally supported by the College.

THE PURPOSE OF UEVHPA

The UEVHPA establishes legal guidelines for recognizing other states' licenses for physicians and healthcare practitioners who volunteer to provide assistance during the time of a declared emergency. Since federal provisions for interstate cooperation do not extend to most private practitioners, UEVHPA calls for the creation of a registration system that out-of-state practitioners may use either before or during a disaster. Upon successful registration, practitioners are expressly permitted to contribute their professional skills to existing organized disaster efforts. In addition, it addresses issues of workers' compensation coverage and civil liability protections for physicians and other licensed health practitioners.

WHY UEVHPA IS IMPORTANT TO SURGERY

Physicians are uniquely qualified to assist during disasters. In particular, surgeons, with their training in trauma and critical care, play a major role in our health care community's response to most disaster situations. Properly trained volunteers are critical in such circumstances.

By enacting the UEVHPA, state legislatures can positively impact disaster response effectiveness. Removing barriers that prohibit licensed surgeons and other qualified responders from traveling across state lines to voluntarily administer medically necessary care during disasters will ensure the citizens of their state access to high-quality surgical services in the event of a crisis.

The American College of Surgeons' Board of Regents supports enactment of the UEVHPA in the 50 states and the District of Columbia

(For further information on the UEVHPA or to participate in state advocacy initiatives to enact the Act, contact Mindy Baker at ACS State Affairs at 312-202-5363, or visit the UEVHPA website at <http://www.uevhpa.org/>).

The American College of Surgeons is a voluntary, educational and scientific organization devoted to the ethical and competent practice of surgery, and to enhancing the quality of care provided to surgical patients. Since 1913, the College has disseminated medical and surgical information to the profession and to the general public, and it has been deeply involved in establishing standards of practice. With over 74,000 members, nearly half of which are general surgeons, the ACS is the largest surgical association in the world.