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December 1, 2015

The Honorable Doug W. Currie
Minister of Health and Wellness
Government of Prince Edward Island
P.O. Box 2000
Charlottetown, PE C1A 7N8
By e-mail: dwcurrie@gov.pe.ca

Subject: Request for an Immediate Systemic Review of the NCLEX

Dear Minister Currie,

Following the recent sobering test results of the third writing of the NCLEX exam since the introduction of the American-based online exam in 2015, the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions (CFNU), and its membership of nearly 200,000 Canadian nurses, formally request a systemic review of the issues with the NCLEX exam. The review must address, amongst other issues, the high NCLEX failure rates, the inequities created by the lack of nation-wide harmonized regulatory standards (re: number of writes, working when failed, length of temporary licenses, etc.), the lack of student supports (to help with prep costs, stress, etc.), particularly for francophone students, and perhaps most regrettably, the lack of acknowledgement from provincial/territorial nursing regulatory bodies that the transition to the NCLEX has been a failure. We cannot afford the loss of health human resources (HHR): the 3,000 plus new university graduates who have failed the NCLEX exam and now find they are unable to work in their chosen profession.

CFNU's member organizations have heard from students across the country that the exam is causing great distress and anxiety. In provinces like Prince Edward Island the failure rate is much higher than last year's Canadian Registered Nurse Exam (CRNE), and some of our top nursing students have failed. It is evident that our graduate nurses have not changed, and nor have our nursing programs: Canada's nursing students are highly qualified, competent individuals graduating from some of the best nursing programs in the world. For CFNU's national leadership, it's clear that there is a problem with the exam. The regulatory bodies' failure to acknowledge this problem, and address the situation immediately, has led to what has been described as a "horrendous" situation for new university graduates. This is why we, as representatives of our frontline nurses, are approaching you to act now as ultimately, from our perspective, the regulatory bodies must be held accountable by provincial/territorial governments.

In order to safeguard the future of our nursing human resources – as represented by students and new graduates – regulators and governments, in conjunction with health care stakeholders, must take responsibility for helping graduate nurses in order to ensure the sustainability of our health care system. A comprehensive and transparent review, which includes all health care stakeholders, must be undertaken immediately to explore the impact of the NCLEX and determine both short-term and long-term solutions. Until this is

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done, graduate nurses will remain in limbo when they fail the exam. Students, set to write the exam in 2016, will be filled with fear and trepidation, knowing they are putting their successful nursing careers at risk because regulators have failed to address the inherent problems with the NCLEX exam.

The CFNU has also heard from employers across the country, who are concerned about the potential loss of employees representing a major investment on the part of employers in terms of orientation and supports. The CFNU, through its member organizations, has committed to working with employers on temporary employment language, financial supports and opening up EAPs.

Minister, first and foremost, the failure of the NCLEX process is an HHR issue that will impact our nursing workforce, now and in the future. Nurses are the largest professional group in Canada's health care workforce – they are essential for frontline health care delivery. Further, the nursing workforce is aging – over 25% of nurses are 55 or over. For many years, the CFNU has been raising the alarm about excessive overtime and high absenteeism rates. Now we are faced with the prospect of losing professional health human resources, a major cost to our health care system.

Thank you for your consideration of this crucial issue, and I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Linda Silas, RN, BScN
CFNU President

Cc: Mona O'Shea, President, Prince Edward Island Nurses' Union
Becky Gosbee, Executive Director, Association of Registered Nurses of Prince Edward Island
Heather Rix, Nursing Policy Analyst/Advisor, PEI Department of Health and Wellness
Anne Sutherland Boal, CEO, Canadian Nurses Association
Dawn Tisdale, President, Canadian Nursing Students' Association
Dr. Cynthia Baker, Executive Director, Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing