

Good morning, Chairpersons and distinguished members of the Pennsylvania Senate and House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committees.

My name is Karen Morahan, and I serve as Director of the UPMC Jameson School of Nursing at UPMC Hamot in Erie. I am also a United States Air Force veteran, having served 11 years on active duty and retiring after 20 years of combined military service.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about our Military Medic to Registered Nurse program—an initiative aligned with “From Combat to Career.”

Every year, highly trained military healthcare professionals return to civilian life with extensive clinical experience. They have provided emergency care in unpredictable environments, responded to trauma, administered medications, monitored critically ill patients, worked within interdisciplinary teams, and made rapid decisions when lives were at stake.

They possess discipline, resilience, leadership, accountability, and a commitment to service—qualities Pennsylvania urgently needs in its nursing workforce.

Yet too often, when military medics and medical technicians transition to civilian careers, their knowledge and experience are not fully recognized. They may be required to begin their education alongside students with no previous healthcare background. This duplication costs veterans time and money, delays their entry into the workforce, and can discourage talented individuals from pursuing nursing altogether.

Our Military Medic to RN pathway is designed to change that.

The program will provide qualified military healthcare personnel with an advanced pathway into our registered nursing diploma program. Applicants would submit their Joint Services Transcript and DD Form 214 so that their military education and experience could be appropriately evaluated. They would also demonstrate competency in nursing fundamentals and medication dosage calculations before receiving advanced placement.

This is not about lowering standards or granting nursing credit simply because someone served in the military. It is about recognizing verified military education, assessing competency, identifying gaps, and providing the focused instruction and clinical experiences needed for the individual to meet the same rigorous outcomes as every other nursing graduate.

Military medicine and civilian nursing are not identical. Veterans entering this pathway may need additional preparation in areas such as long-term disease management, care across the lifespan, behavioral health, maternal-child nursing, and the regulatory responsibilities of the registered nurse. Our program addresses those areas while building upon the clinical judgment, technical ability, leadership, and composure these veterans already possess.

Participants complete the required nursing coursework and supervised clinical education, satisfy all Pennsylvania State Board of Nursing requirements, and be required to pass the same NCLEX-RN licensure examination as every other registered nurse.

Pennsylvania benefits in several important ways.

First, this pathway strengthens our nursing workforce. Hospitals and healthcare facilities across the Commonwealth continue to need practice-ready nurses, particularly in medical-surgical units, emergency departments, critical care, behavioral health, and rural communities.

Second, it creates a meaningful civilian career pathway for veterans. Registered nursing offers professional growth, financial stability, and opportunities to continue serving others. For many veterans, nursing is not a completely new career—it is the civilian continuation of a calling they began while wearing the uniform.

Third, it helps keep veterans and their families in Pennsylvania. By connecting military experience to education and employment, we can reduce barriers that might otherwise cause veterans to leave the Commonwealth in search of more accessible opportunities.

Finally, this program makes responsible use of the training our nation has already invested in these service members. Their experience should not be ignored, but it must be translated thoughtfully and safely into civilian nursing practice.

I respectfully ask the General Assembly and committees to support Military Medic to RN pathways through policies that encourage appropriate recognition of military healthcare education, collaboration with the Pennsylvania State Board of Nursing, and financial support for veterans completing the transition to registered nursing.

Our veterans should not have to leave their healthcare knowledge, leadership, and identity behind when they leave military service. We will provide them with a clear

bridge—one that honors what they have already achieved while preparing them for the full scope and responsibility of registered nursing.

The journey from combat to career should not require veterans to start over. It should allow them to move forward.

With your support, Pennsylvania can become a leader in transforming military medical experience into nursing careers, strengthening our healthcare workforce, and honoring veterans through opportunity—not simply with our words, but through meaningful action.

Thank you for your time, your service to the Commonwealth, and your commitment to Pennsylvania's veterans. I welcome your questions.