December 7, 2012

Jay P. Douglas, R.N., Executive Director
Virginia Board of Nursing
Department of Health Professions
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Dear Director Douglas,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding the proposed regulations on continued competency requirements, amending Title 18 of the Virginia Administrative Code.

As a nonprofit, nonpartisan social welfare organization with a membership and offices in all 50 states, AARP’s mission is to help people 50+ have independence, choice and control in ways that are beneficial and affordable to them and society as a whole. We seek to help older Americans live long and healthy lives. AARP Virginia, representing over one million members, is the state’s largest organization representing the needs, views, desires, and hopes of Virginia’s 50+ population.

The proposed regulations are a good step towards ensuring the continuing education of nursing licensees, but we remain concerned that the regulations do not require the assessment of continuing competence of licensees as a condition of periodic license renewal. AARP believes that all health professionals should be required to maintain competency in their respective professions. Working with professional organizations, consumers, and other interested parties, we recommend that states work to phase in a mandatory continuing competency system for all health professionals. Such a system should include procedures to assess the continuing competence of licensees as a condition of periodic license renewal. Furthermore, we urge state licensing boards to establish standards for ensuring continued competency and to consider granting deemed status to continuing competence programs administered by voluntary credentialing and specialty boards, or by hospitals and other health care delivery institutions, when the private programs meet board-established standards.

The list of learning activities in Section A of the proposed regulations and the types of providers listed in Section B provide an acceptable foundation for the learning activities that should be required of licensees and accord with the 2011 Institute of Medicine Report, The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health (Recommendation 6 - Ensure that nurses engage in lifelong learning). However, AARP believes that to assure continued competence, state licensing boards should go beyond mandatory continuing education requirements to require
demonstrations of continued competence that include periodic assessment of knowledge, skills, and clinical performance, along with development, execution, and documentation of an improvement plan based on the assessment.

In an AARP survey of Virginia residents age 50+, ninety-five percent of respondents agreed that all health care professionals should be required to demonstrate that they have up-to-date knowledge and skills as a condition of retaining their license to practice in Virginia. In fact, as our survey found, the public overwhelmingly and inaccurately assumes that Virginia licensing boards already monitor on-going health care professional competence in Virginia.

Given the above, we would strongly encourage you to revise the proposed regulations in two areas. First, we encourage the Board of Nursing to expand the proposed regulations beyond mandatory continuing education requirements to require the periodic assessment of continued competence. Second, we recommend that the Board of Nursing include in the list of recognized providers of continuing education, other non-nursing clinical provider organizations, such as pharmacy, physician and social work groups, in order to encourage interprofessional education and collaboration.

In conclusion, the Board of Nursing has an important opportunity to protect AARP members and the public by requiring the assessment of continued competency through these new regulations. AARP appreciates the Board’s efforts in this area and looks forward to our ongoing collaboration to ensure quality care for all Virginians. If you have questions, please feel free to contact me at AARP Virginia, 707 E. Main Street, Suite 910, Richmond, VA 23219, (804) 344-3059 or ddebiasi@aarp.org

Thank you for your consideration,

David M. DeBiasi, R.N., B.S. N.
Associate State Director