October 4, 2013

Economic Affairs Interim Committee
Montana State Legislature

Dear Committee Members:

I would like to address the review of the Board of Radiologic Technologists (BORT) that is being performed by your committee which is called for by House Bill No. 525 introduced by McNiven, Cook, O'Hara, Evans, Lavin, Ehli, O'Neil, and Welborn.

During the mid-1970's it was common for untrained individuals in doctor's offices and small clinics to be given a brief "this is how you do it" session by some other individual in the office for performing x-ray studies. At this time the radiologic technologists in Montana through their professional society, the Montana Society of Radiologic Technologists (MSRT), with the help of Larry Lloyd of the Radiologic Health Division of the Montana State Department of Health drafted a bill to require licensure of individuals who apply ionizing radiation in the form of x-rays to human patients. This bill was passed by the Montana Legislature because it was a step toward protecting the general public from excessive exposure to radiation.

Without this law and the establishment of the BORT, any untrained individual could perform x-ray procedures on patients in Montana. Under the provisions of this law, the BORT established some minimum education requirements for these individuals and a test to evaluate their competency related to radiation protection, patient positioning for various radiographic examinations, and selection of the exposure parameters necessary to produce an acceptable radiographic image. Individuals who wished to provide a training course for imaging were required to have the BORT review and approve their course prior to presentation. Upon passing the BORT examination the individual was issued a limited permit that allowed them to perform limited radiographic studies. Advanced imaging procedures were excluded from the scope of practice allowed for these individuals. Individuals who had completed formal radiography training in a program approved by the American Registry of Radiologic Technologists (ARRT) and passed the certification examination for radiography provided by the ARRT were issued a state license by the BORT.

The BORT was also given the duty to check for compliance with this law. Although it did not have the authority to enforce the law, they were able to verify the possession of a state issued limited permit or license for the individuals who were performing radiographic procedures in Montana. Violations that were found were reported to the local county attorney.

In the years since licensure was established, the BORT has expanded the requirements to obtain and maintain a limited permit for radiography to include a minimum of sixteen (16) hours of observation with a registered radiologic technologist prior to obtaining a permit and yearly completion of six hours of continuing education approved by the BORT after receiving their limited permit.

Formal training in radiologic technology is available in Montana through any of five (5) college-based radiography programs. These programs are located in Billings, Butte, Great Falls, Kalispell, and Missoula. Acceptance into these programs requires completion of a set of pre-requisite courses followed by selection into the clinical portion of the program. The enrollment in the clinical programs is limited by the availability of clinical sites at which the students acquire the valuable clinical experience necessary to perform radiographic procedures. To my knowledge most of the clinical programs are five semesters in length. While in the clinical program the students receive formal didactic instruction related to the various aspects of radiographic imaging including patient care, radiographic positioning, radiobiology/radiation protection, exposure selection, image evaluation, and radiation physics including x-ray circuitry. Following graduation from the clinical program the student is eligible to take a certification examination in radiography provided by the ARRT which is recognized throughout the U.S.

In Montana the majority of hospitals are small rural facilities with very limited resources. They may not be able to afford the salary that a registered technologist could make in a larger facility which might make it difficult for them to hire a fully trained individual. Even if they are able to afford to hire a registered technologist, the facility might have difficulty in recruiting someone to come to a small town with very little in the way of social activities for the individual to participate in. In many of these small facilities, the individual may be "on call" 24 hours a day. When they want to take a vacation, they may have to arrange for x-ray coverage while they are gone. For these small facilities it is much more feasible for them to have one or two individuals who are established in the community and already have some medical background, such as a laboratory technologist or nurse, attend a limited radiography course and then provide the radiography service when the need arises. X-ray imaging in these small rural facilities is usually limited to minor injuries caused by farm accidents or chest radiography following treatment for some type of infection. Any patients with major injuries or serious medical problems will usually be transferred to one of the larger facilities in the state where advanced treatment and imaging are available.

I have been a registered technologist and radiography instructor in Great Falls since 1973 and would like you to know that Montana was one of the first states to pass a licensure law to protect the public from exposure to excessive radiation. I would be more than happy to discuss this issue with you. [see original for contact information] Please do not undo this legislation which is necessary for the protection for the citizens of Montana.

Sincerely,

Thomas M. Liston, R.T. (R)