

Hello, my name is Jasmine Thomas. I'm an active-duty army spouse that is stationed in Fort Campbell, KY. I am a stay-at-home mother of two and I attended Fortis Institute, a for profit school in Nashville, Tennessee.

I started going to Fortis in July 2020 with hopes that by 2022 I would receive my associates degree in Nursing and be able to provide for my family as a Registered Nurse. I was robbed of this. I made it all the way to the end of the program after two years of a long commute to school, while my husband was deployed and I was taking care of two small children.

Now Fortis is withholding my degree and stopping me from taking my NCLEX-RN exam.

Fortis will not let nursing students graduate unless they get a certain score on an NCLEX predictor test called a HESI exam. The HESI administrators say the test is supposed to help students prepare for the NCLEX and they do not recommend using the test to block students from taking the NCLEX. Even Fortis' nursing program accreditor, ACEN, says it is not a good educational practice to use exams like the HESI to prevent students from graduating and taking the NCLEX, but ACEN has not stopped schools from using it.

The first time I took the HESI I got below Fortis' required score of 850, so I took it again and this time I got an 883, but Fortis said it had changed the requirements and now I needed to get a 900 on the HESI. I appealed this decision and took it to the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. The Commission said that they would not intervene because the school acted within its policies when it made the change. So I took the HESI again and this time I got a score of 954 and also got a 93% on my final simulation. You would think that would be it, and I'd be allowed to graduate, but it wasn't. Two weeks before graduation, Fortis added a different predictor test to the final class that was worth 20% of our grade. This was a different test than the one included in the syllabus that we had been studying for. We needed a 78% to pass the class and I ended up making a **77.45%** because of the new test.

I have filed a complaint with the Tennessee Commission again, and I have looked at filing complaints with Fortis' accreditors but submitting a complaint to them is very complicated.

When predictor tests are used to keep nursing students from graduating and from taking the NCLEX, they are called "high-stakes exams". It certainly was that for my family. I left the school with nothing. I took the final class 2 times and each time the class cost \$3,000. I went all the way through the program and ended up paying \$40,000 to this school, just to not even walk away with a degree, and not able to take the NCLEX. This

has put my family's finances at risk. My husband and I even lost my vehicle because I couldn't work due to the classes and clinicals that were required. All while paying \$900 for daycare.

I have fought tooth and nail to get this decision reversed and I am angry over how unfair this has been to me and my family. I do not understand how Fortis was allowed to change the requirements and allowed to use the HESI tests to keep me from graduating and taking the NCLEX. At the very least it seems the school should not be allowed to block students from taking the NCLEX because that just makes it look like the school has a better licensure exam pass rate than it has.

I am here today to ask you to consider rules to make sure that the accreditors and agencies that approve schools are not allowing schools to engage in unfair educational practices that hurt students.

Thank you for your time.