

Hi, my name is Jasmine Thomas. I spoke at the public hearing in April and shared my awful experience at Fortis Institute. I wanted to speak again today because it is important that you keep what happened to me from happening to other students. I am now \$28,000 in debt, and don't even have a degree to show for it.

I started the nursing program at Fortis in 2020 and expected to be done with the program in two years. This was a stressful time in my life—my husband was serving in the Army in Poland, I was alone with our two young children, and I had a long commute to classes. After making it to the end of my program, Fortis refused to give me my degree and prevented me from taking the NCLEX because I had not received their required score of an 850 on the HESI Exit Exam. The HESI is just a practice test for the NCLEX, but Fortis won't let students graduate without a certain score, even if a student completed all other parts of the curriculum.

I took the HESI a second time and received an 883. But the school had increased its required score from an 850 to a 900. I filed a complaint with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission, but they did not do anything. I had to take the final nursing course again and take the HESI exam a third time.

I scored a 954. That still wasn't enough because Fortis added a new standardized test. Apparently, my score was not high enough on that test, and I was half a percentage point short of passing the course and graduating. I filed another complaint with the Tennessee Commission, but they ruled against me in both of my complaints.

I also filed complaints with Fortis' accreditors, including ACEN, the nursing program accreditor. ACEN had a policy that using exams like the HESI to keep students from graduating was not a best educational practice. But that did not matter. Neither of the accreditors helped me.

I have spent a lot of the past year trying to advocate for myself and understand what happened. I've read about how it is considered a High Stakes Exam when schools use the HESI to prevent students from graduating. And that schools use High Stakes Exams to protect their NCLEX pass rate, and how the maker of the HESI says schools should not use the exam to prevent students from graduating.

But nothing I have read has helped me understand why schools are still allowed to do it.

My time at Fortis was financially and emotionally devastating for my family. I am here to ask the Committee to do something so that this does not happen to other students.

Thank you for your time.