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BRIGID KELLY

State Representative

Chairman Lipps, Ranking Member Boyd, and members of the House Health Committee, thank you for the opportunity for Representative Smith and I to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 455.

HB 455 addresses the increased importance of utilizing qualified surgical assistants in Ohio; especially in light of the COVID-19 Pandemic, hospital resources are diminishing but the need for quality patient care just continues to grow.

I was surprised to learn that there is no requirement in Ohio that an individual must receive any kind of minimum education or training in order to engage in invasive, hands-on tasks as an assistant to surgeons in the operating room. Surgical assistants perform a wide variety of functions, some of which have a dramatic impact on patient safety and the procedure's success. For example, some of the regular tasks performed by a surgical assistant include: assisting with incisions; placement / securing of wound drains and overall wound care; and changing, suturing and cutting tissue where necessary. Although literature released by the American College of Surgeons indicates that surgical assistants should be adequately trained via national credentialing standards, no such requirement exists in Ohio. Other states—including Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Nebraska, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia—have some type of licensure or registration process that applies to surgical assistants.

This bipartisan legislation would create a simple registration process for surgical assistant practitioners, requiring those operating in Ohio to be registered with the State Medical Board. The registration would require evidence of proper credentialing, but the bill also includes a “grandfathering” provision allowing anyone who has practiced as a surgical assistant in the last 6 months to be automatically eligible for approval. Requirements may be waived for registered nurses and physician assistants. We have also developed a “licensure” framework that aligns with the State Medical Board’s existing procedures for approving other professionals to enter into the healthcare field. The bottom line is we are trying to ensure minimum education / training for these individuals in a way that does not create barriers to entry into the workforce.

In addition, the bill allows for a waiver process from the requirements for any assistants located in a “physician shortage area,” as defined by the State Medical Board. Thus, hospitals in rural areas of the state with staffing shortage issues could apply for a waiver where necessary.

We ask your support of this legislation to increase patient safety and the quality of patient care in the operating room. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to this important piece of legislation. We would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

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