

BEFORE THE HOUSE STATE AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE

**REPRESENTATIVE WIGGAM
CHAIR**

**TESTIMONY
OF
BRUCE JOHNSON
PRESIDENT
INTER-UNIVERSITY COUNCIL OF OHIO**

JUNE 3, 2020

The Public Universities of Ohio

The University of Akron
University of Cincinnati
Miami University
Ohio University
Wright State University

Bowling Green State University
Cleveland State University
Northeast Ohio Medical University
Shawnee State University
Youngstown State University

Central State University
Kent State University
The Ohio State University
The University of Toledo

Chairman Wiggam, Vice Chair Stephens, Ranking Member Kelly and members of the House State and Local Government Committee. Thank you for allowing me to provide proponent testimony today in support of House Bill 673 on behalf of the state's fourteen public universities, all of which are members of the Inter-University Council of Ohio (IUC). My name is Bruce Johnson and I am the President of the IUC.

The IUC was established in 1939 as a voluntary educational association of Ohio's public universities. It is committed to ensuring affordable opportunities for the more than 329,000 students attending our member institutions without sacrificing the quality of their education or experience.

House Bill 673 requires the Chancellor of Higher Education to establish a program to provide grants to eligible institutions to expedite and increase the offering of coursework that leads to healthcare-related credentialing. The IUC supports this provision because any additional assistance the state can provide through this new program designed to facilitate and expedite the education of those working towards a healthcare degree is exactly what is needed at this critical time in Ohio's fight against COVID-19. Just this past Spring Semester, Ohio's public universities produced 6,506 graduates with an associate degree, bachelor's degree, doctoral degree, or professional degree in a variety of healthcare fields and professions.

Examples of those professions included physicians, nurses, respiratory therapists, mental health counselors, pharmacists, and other allied healthcare specialists. Those graduates will not only care for the sick and injured, but also engage in groundbreaking research to solve pressing global health problems. Their timely work includes researching the cause and effects of COVID-19 and developing vaccines and cures. The IUC appreciates and supports Representative Roemer's recognition and desire to help our students earn a credential, graduate in a healthcare field, and then join the workforce to, literally, save the lives of others.

The IUC also supports the provisions in House Bill 673 that continues, until July 1, 2021, the suspension of the requirement that an applicant pass a licensure examination to receive a license to practice as a registered nurse or licensed practical nurse; that specifies that a nursing license issued without examination is valid until July 1, 2021; and that requires the Nursing Board to count hours worked under a temporary license issued without examination towards any clinical experience that must be completed before a nurse is eligible to take the licensure examination, when the temporary license expires.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, many of our nursing students were negatively impacted, especially those who were nearing graduation and initially lost the ability to do clinical work at hospitals. However, with the enactment of House Bill 197, which took effect on March 27, a great degree of flexibility was granted that led to more nurses, graduates of our public universities, being placed in the workforce in greater numbers. It enabled them to get to the front line in the fight against the virus more quickly and in some cases, after graduation but prior to being officially licensed by the Board of Nursing. Now, House Bill 673 would essentially do the same thing and extend those deadlines established in the previous legislation. The sponsor clearly recognizes the value of those individuals in the fight against COVID-19 and that the need for their assistance is still great.

The IUC appreciates the sponsor's desire for fairness and flexibility and his willingness to introduce legislation to tackle the unpredictable and unforeseen consequences of trying to educate public university students in the midst of a global pandemic by reducing or removing regulatory barriers. Doing so goes a long way to helping ensure Ohio's public universities can provide a high-quality, high-value education to the students we serve – whether they are studying to become teachers or nurses. It also will help ensure students can take full advantage of the opportunities available to them. To effectively use the knowledge and skills gained through one's education for the benefit of others is something we hope all our graduates will be able to experience. Even if that happens before being officially licensed, as was the case for these nursing graduates. House Bill 673 would facilitate that goal, making it easier for our students to get the training they need now and to join the workforce as soon as possible.

We support the continuation of these policies and the flexibility granted by this legislation. Thank you Chairman Wiggam and members of the committee for the opportunity to speak in support of House Bill 673.