



May 20, 2020

Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee

Re: ONA Comments on Senate Bill 308

Chairman Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Minority Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee. My name is Lisa Ochs, the Ohio Nurses Association Chief Executive Officer, and I appreciate the opportunity to provide written testimony on Senate Bill 308, a bill aimed to grant immunity to essential workers who provide healthcare to COVID-19 patients, among its other stated purposes.

The Ohio Nurses Association (ONA) is the recognized leader and advocate for professional nurses and nursing in Ohio. Established in 1904, ONA was founded on the principles of protecting, promoting and advancing the profession of nursing. As an association of nearly 10,000 nurses, ONA strives to improve the health and wellbeing of all Ohio's citizens and we believe SB 308 is intended to allow healthcare professionals, including nurses, to provide quality healthcare to Ohio's patients without fear of liability.

ONA supports legislation that recognizes nurses across our state have stood on the frontlines during the COVID-19 pandemic, providing care to Ohioans during unprecedented times, with a novel virus that is unpredictable, in an environment where many conditions are beyond a nurse's control. We believe nurses have not only stepped up during this time of crisis, but have done so without questioning how it may impact their own lives or the lives of their families.

The United States healthcare system was not prepared for a pandemic of this magnitude and it is apparent that we are continuing to identify flaws at all levels of the care environment. This environment includes a system where we have a lack of personal protective equipment, a shortage of testing kits and limited contact tracing. Additionally, healthcare professionals have been deployed to other areas where they may not have received proper onboarding and orientation, while other areas experience staffing shortages due to COVID-19-infected healthcare workers or healthcare workers that have been quarantined. As result, ONA supports changes to the bill to ensure that nurses and other healthcare workers are fully protected in these and similar COVID-19 scenarios.

As the healthcare community continues to learn about COVID-19, we have adapted to an environment that is evolving each and every day. While the healthcare community continues to be nimble, professionals in this system realize that there are multiple unknown variables beyond control, including a virus that presents itself differently in each individual, and in some cases, transmits and infects others without outward symptoms being presented. ONA believes that nurses and other healthcare professionals should not have to worry about lawsuits for doing their jobs under circumstances beyond their control. At the same time, registered nurses and other essential workers have been infected by the virus. As patients and healthcare consumers, they are entitled to receive high quality care. Changes to existing law must not reduce the standard of care that they and other patients receive now and in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments on Senate Bill 308. We look forward to working with you in an effort to address the concerns of registered nurses, healthcare providers and patients in these critical areas and would be happy to address any questions you may have in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Ochs".

Lisa Ochs, Chief Executive Officer