



Thank you, Chairman Wiggam, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, for allowing me to testify on behalf of Ohio's independent, nonprofit colleges and universities and their students. My name is C. Todd Jones and I am president and general counsel of the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Ohio.

AICUO represents 51 nonprofit institutions of higher education in our state. Our members educate nearly 131,000 students, and award about one third of the baccalaureate degrees in Ohio each year, and an even higher share of our state's degrees in mathematics, natural and biological sciences, and other key areas of study. In the most recent data available, Ohio has 32 independent institutions providing nursing degrees ranging from associate to doctorate level which accounted for over 3,200 students. AICUO institutions also produced almost 1,200 education bachelor's degrees from 38 different institutions.

I am testifying as today as a proponent of House Bill 6, which codifies into law some pandemic-related practices around health care and the teaching professions. Last March, when colleges and universities moved to online learning, many nursing students found themselves unable to fulfill the clinical hours needed for a nursing license. Thankfully, when the legislature passed House Bill 197, it created a new pandemic nursing license and gave institutions the flexibility to allow seniors to graduate and start working in their fields. However, the provisions in HB 197 expired on December 31, 2020. AICUO was supportive of HB 673 in the last General Assembly, which passed the House unanimously. We were happy to see the sponsor quickly reintroduced that bill as the current House Bill 6, which ensures those practices are written into law and not subject to bureaucratic changes.

Extending pandemic nursing license rules to July 1, 2021, assures current students that no matter what happens in this spring, they will have the ability to continue with their education and workforce plans. In a January 2021 PEW article, *Public Health Systems Still Aren't Ready for the Next Pandemic*, data shows there has been a 16 percent decline in public health workers in the last decade. Ohio's hospitals, emergency rooms, doctors' offices, and urgent care facilities need Ohio's nursing workforce.

The *Washington Post* in December 2020 published an article, "As hospitals swell, nursing students are tapped to join the front lines for the second time," that highlighted what different states are doing to help support frontline workers. Maryland encouraged colleges and universities to grant health-care students who are in their final semesters and have satisfied graduation requirements to permit an early exit from their programs. Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson ordered graduating nursing students be fast-tracked into the state's medical workforce. Yet today, Ohio's Nursing Board sits, eleven months into the pandemic, with no changes or proposed changes to help our workforce. It is truly a blight on Ohio's reaction to the pandemic.

Codifying language that working hours are also clinical hours may seem unnecessary, but it is another stopgap measure that will ensure that each current nursing student will be able to complete his or her degree if hospitals have to stop offering clinical hours again due to COVID-19. The same is true for the language regarding teacher education programs. I do not think anyone can say with certainty what the future will look like for K-12 education, but this bill will help ensure a smooth transition for teacher education students no matter what the scenario will be. Fortunately, the Ohio Department of Education supported changes this spring and will likely do the same for House Bill 6.

AICUO also supports the floor amendments added before the bill passed unanimously. If a nursing graduate is able to take a test and fails, or if the graduate fails a background check, he or she should be disqualified from working. There is also no mandate that hospitals must hire these workers. However, we know that many hospitals are desperate for nurses and this could be another tool in their toolbelt.

Please note that Aultman College of Nursing, the University of Dayton, and Xavier University have all submitted written testimony in support of House Bill 6.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.