



Testimony before the Senate Workforce & Higher Education Committee

Wednesday, May 19, 2021

Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Senate Workforce & Higher Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide proponent testimony for Senate Bill 135, specifically in support of its proposal to remove obstacles currently in place that prevent otherwise-qualified Community Colleges from offering a Bachelor's Degree in Nursing.

I am Dr. Cynthia Spiers, President of Rhodes State College in Lima, Ohio, located in Allen County. Let me start by saying that Rhodes State serves a ten-County region, (Allen, Auglaize, Mercer, Putnam, Logan, Van Wert, Hardin, Hancock, Paulding and Shelby Counties). We provide over seventy degree programs and certificates to the people of these counties with a mission to change lives, build futures, and improve communities through life-long learning. I greatly appreciate the continued support and investment in all sectors of higher education, and in the strong support, advocacy and the recognition of the value of the twenty-three community colleges in Ohio which maintain quality programming that is accessible and affordable to those living within our communities.

As a community technical college we play a critical role in workforce development and meeting workforce demand. We have a broad mission to provide academic programming and skills training to prepare individuals for jobs that provide a livable wage and meet the workforce demand, as well as to provide the coursework necessary for students to transfer to four-year institutions.

But, more importantly, the vast majority of our students—91%—come to Rhodes State from our ten-county region. What's more, 87% of Rhodes State students, upon graduation, make the choice to remain in our region to work and raise a family. In truth, we are the one college whose mission is to serve the educational and workforce needs of the people of this region. Our regional employers have called us the "cornerstone of education" in the area because of the quality of our graduates, and because of our ability to serve their needs as employers.

The primary reason for my testimony today is because of the alarming nursing shortage within our region, and in particular, at the two largest hospitals in the area (Lima Memorial Hospital and Mercy-Health St. Rita's). According to both hospitals, these shortages will only continue to grow and they need many additional Bachelor's in Nursing graduates to fulfill their current and future critical workforce need.

According to Lima Memorial's letter of support for our program, they need 80% of the nurses to hold BSN degrees, but only 40% of frontline/direct care staff do so, and only 54% overall. In addition, Mercy Health identified the need for 40-80 nurses annually for the next three to five years, and due to retirements, the need will be at the top end of that range. Data reported by *Labor Insights - Burning Glass Technologies* indicated that for the month of April 2021 there were job openings for 127 nurses in the ten-county region, and 41 openings in Allen County alone. This is reflective of only one month. Other hospitals in our region have similar shortages. That's why we have seen an overwhelming interest and support from our area health providers for Rhodes State to offer the pre-licensure bachelor's degree in nursing (BSN), as well as a program to enable those nurses with Associate Degrees in Nursing (ADN) to complete their BSN. Our region—indeed the entire State—needs both more nurses who graduate with a BSN and more nurses, who currently have only an Associate degree in nursing, to complete their BSN.

The nursing shortage is not just a local problem. It's true throughout the State. It's a chronic shortage that Ohio institutions of higher education have not been able to solve.



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Current Ohio law is part of the problem. Today, the Chancellor of Higher Education can only approve community college BSN programs where there is no bachelor's degree program available from a state university or private college, and is only permitted to authorize *applied bachelor's* degrees at community colleges. The bachelor's in nursing is not an applied degree. Proposed programs are routinely objected to as duplicative, sometimes even by universities that are located far outside the community college's region. The current law discourages community colleges who want to help meet their region's local nursing shortage from even trying to offer programs. As a consequence, the shortage continues.

And it's not just that the shortage is chronic. It's also becoming more acute. In our region and around the State, Covid fatigue is causing an alarming number of frontline nurses to speed up retirement plans. The need is greater than ever.

But, for Rhodes State to be able to offer programs to address and shrink this nursing shortage, we need your help. Senate Bill 135, sponsored by Senator Cirino, offers a viable solution. Under the bill, the existence of other nursing programs in the region would not constitute grounds to reject a community college BSN program. We need every existing program, and many more, to meet Ohio's critical nursing shortage.

Having more community college BSN degrees has another advantage that should not be overlooked: Community colleges by law charge one rate for tuition per credit hour—that means the tuition is the same for general education credits, credits leading to an accounting degree, a medical coding and billing certificate, and coursework for a BSN. If a student and their family wants to get the best value for their money, they should look no further than the Rhodes State BSN degree.

We estimate that a four-year nursing degree would cost a Rhodes State student \$21,648 in tuition over four years. Doing that at a State university will cost double or more, and at a private college, five times or more.

SB 135 will lead to more affordable BSN degrees on tuition alone, but that's not all: those who choose a community college for their BSN will also likely save on housing and living expenses. Community colleges don't have expensive student housing or required meal plans. Since most students come from the local area, many if not most students remain at home while attending college. Nursing students at community colleges will graduate with at best a small fraction of the debt that they would incur for the same degree anywhere else. Quite a few will have no debt at all, unheard of with professional degrees.

Contrary to the impression some opponents want to create, we are not trying to undercut the competition or be the only provider. Some students want the experience of attending a State or private university. Others want a more diverse academic curriculum rather than to concentrate only on a nursing degree. But what we do know is that we desperately need more nursing programs in order to meet our workforce needs. Even if all currently approved educational providers continue to offer a nursing degree, and Rhodes State were approved to offer the degree as well, it would only reduce rather than end the nursing shortage at Ohio's hospitals.



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It's also important to note that students who attend four-year private and public institutions in our region are less likely to stay in the area after they graduate. It's hard to blame them when they often come from somewhere else or when their tuition is so much higher and other areas can offer higher salaries. But, to meet the nursing shortage in our ten-county region of Northwest Ohio, and other rural and small-town areas of the State, it is imperative that Rhodes State and other community colleges be allowed to help meet this critical workforce shortage.

Thank you, Chairman Johnson and members of the committee, for your time and attention today. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.



Affiliate of ProMedica

April 2, 2021

Cynthia Spiers, Ph.D.
President
Rhodes State College
4240 Campus drive
Lima, Ohio 45804

Dear Dr. Spiers:

Lima Memorial Health System (LMHS) is pleased to support Rhodes State College in its pursuit of a Bachelor of Science (BSN) degree program. The BSN program will provide highly trained and skilled nurses for our local community and greatly impact the healthcare of patients we serve within a 10-county radius.

LMHS, like the rest of the nation, has a greater need for BSN graduate nurses than can be met through currently available nursing programs. Today, the overall BSN rate at LMHS is 54% with only a 40% BSN rate for frontline/direct care staff. This falls short of the Institute of Medicine's goal by 2020 of 80%. With 500 nurses employed by LMHS, and 25% over the age of 50 and likely to exit the workforce in the next five to ten years, LMHS will likely need to hire more than a hundred nurses over the next decade. Even if all of them were to hold a BSN degree, that would still leave us with a need for an additional one hundred or more of our existing nursing staff to complete their BSN.

LMHS reimburses tuition for our own nurses who pursue advanced BSN completion. Many of them choose online, out of state programs because they are the most affordable and quick path to a BSN degree.

Rhodes State College's local BSN degree program will allow us to provide advanced training for our nurses while we invest in our own community. LMHS is fully supportive and committed to the implementation of a BSN degree program at Rhodes State College as we work collegially to provide the best healthcare available for our community.

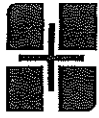
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael D. Swick".

Michael D. Swick
President & CEO
Lima Memorial Health System

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ann Pohl".

Ann Pohl, DNP, RN
Vice President of Patient Care Services & CNO
Lima Memorial Health System



PAULDING

COUNTY HOSPITAL

March 4th, 2021

Dr. Cynthia Spiers, President
Rhodes State College
4240 Campus Drive
Lima, OH 45804

Dear Dr. Spiers,

On behalf of Paulding County Hospital, please accept this letter of support for Rhodes State College in their pursuit of adding a Bachelor's of Science in Nursing (BSN) program. Paulding County Hospital, located in Paulding, Ohio, is a 25 bed Critical Access Hospital (CAH). We employ close to 250 individuals, 43 whom are registered nurses and roughly 40% hold a bachelor's degree or higher. Education has a significant impact on the knowledge and competencies of nurse clinicians. A bachelor's prepared nurse typically has more in depth knowledge in evidenced-based practices and critical thinking. They typically have done more research and are able to provide advanced care to our patients.

According to The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, they are forecasting a faster-than-average growth in nursing jobs, 12% increase, by 2028. Some contributing factors include nurse retirement, aging population and burnout, all which increases the need for the replacement of nursing leadership. While both the Associate of Science in Nursing (ASN) and Bachelors of Science in Nursing (BSN) graduates enter an organization with similar clinical skills, a BSN prepared nurse receives the knowledge and skills required for advanced roles within healthcare organizations like our own. Some of the advanced roles include: care coordinators, case managers, nursing informatics, quality specialists, nursing department directors/supervisors/managers and administration. These management type positions are essential for smooth operation of an organization and requires, at minimum, a bachelor's degree.

Paulding County Hospital has accepted students from Rhodes State College for preceptorships and hope this will continue for those who enroll in the BSN program. There is a need to further educate our nursing clinicians to help prepare Paulding County Hospital and other healthcare facilities for the future. Rhodes has proven to produce high quality students and we look forward to them educating ones who could potentially fill our next advanced nursing role opening.

Sincerely,

Kyle Mawer MBA, BSN, RN
Chief Operating/Nursing Officer
Paulding County Hospital



Dr. Cynthia Spiers, President
Rhodes State College
4240 Campus Dr.
Lima, OH 45804

January 29, 2021

It is my pleasure to write this letter in support of the proposed Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree program offered by Rhodes State College. The plans for this program are timely in helping OhioHealth meet our nursing workforce needs both now and in the future. The shortage of BSN prepared registered nurses is acute, making it increasingly difficult for us to achieve our mission and goals for healthcare. Rhodes offers an acute care and critical care track that aligns with OhioHealth's Acute Care and Advanced Care transition to practice fellowship programs.

OhioHealth and Rhodes State College have partnered in the past in support of their LPN and ADN programs to provide clinical education experiences in our facilities. To ensure the college enrollment goals are met, OhioHealth will continue to provide those critical clinical experiences without creating undue stress on our system or other nursing education programs OhioHealth currently supports. OhioHealth Hardin Memorial Hospital, which provides care in Ohio's rural northern region, will benefit greatly from Rhodes State College's new BSN program.

OhioHealth has 12 hospitals across Ohio, hiring over 400 new graduate ADN and BSN prepared nurses into fellowship programs annually. As the demand for new graduate nurses continues to rise, OhioHealth hiring goals are set to meet the demand. To align with our nursing excellence and quality goals, OhioHealth requires all RNs to have their BSN within 5 years of hire. Supporting Rhodes State College BSN program aligns with those goals.

We are pleased to support new and creative solutions to meet the nursing workforce challenges that we face in our community and in our state. If you have any questions about our commitment to this endeavor, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Hickey, MHA, BSN, RN-BC

Kathleen Hickey, MHA, BSN, RN-BC
OhioHealth Learning
Manager of Learning: Academic Partnerships
614-202-8725
Kathleen.Hickey@OhioHealth.com



January 27, 2021

Dr. Cynthia Spiers, President
Rhodes State College
4240 Campus Drive
Lima, Ohio 45804

Dear Dr. Spiers:

On behalf of Mercy Health, St. Rita's Medical Center, we are pleased to announce our support of the Rhodes State College proposal to offer a Bachelor of Science in Nursing program.

Offering these programs at Rhodes State would create a steady stream of potential employees that could benefit organizations like ours in Northwest Ohio. These degrees would be offered on the Rhodes State campus, which makes earning the bachelor's degree convenient. Offering them at the Rhodes State tuition rate makes them affordable. Further, offering these degrees on our student-centered campus makes them achievable. All of this adds up to an exciting opportunity for our entire region.

This endeavor will help alleviate the shortage of nurses in our region and across the state. As we as an organization struggle with the nationwide shortage of nurses, the strong relationship we have with Rhodes State College will only serve to help fill the vacancies we currently experience and provide our community with well trained and educated caregivers.

These programs will generate additional opportunities to enhance incumbent worker training as well.

We will support this initiative by providing curriculum advisement to ensure that the skills taught at Rhodes State continually align with our workforce needs. We further anticipate giving strong employment consideration to graduates of these applied baccalaureate degrees.

If you in need of additional information, please to do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Cory Werts, RN, MSN, NE-BC
MH, St. Rita's Medical Center
Chief Nursing Officer
cxwerts@mercy.com

Mercy Health
Director, Talent Acquisition
SMWilliams1@mercy.com

Nurse Recruiter
LBrinkman@mercy.com

Shannon Williams

Lindsay Brinkman
MH, St. Rita's Medical Center



Monday February 1, 2021

Dr. Cynthia Spiers, President
Rhodes State College
4240 Campus Dr
Lima, OH 45804

Dr. Spiers,

The Talent Acquisition partners for Mercy Health St. Rita's (MHSR) have reviewed your proposal for a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree and are in high support of this initiative. Bachelor prepared nurses have spent more time in the classroom than Associate/Diploma prepared nurses and this allows for the Bachelor prepared nurses to be more prepared to "hit the ground running" when it comes to starting their career.

Currently, the majority of MHSR's Bachelor prepared RN's are coming to us with degrees from Ohio University. Ohio University is about a 3 hour drive from St. Rita's, a BSN program located closer to the hospital would be valuable for those that don't want to leave the area or want to become an RN as a second career.

MHSR has Bachelor prepared nurses that have graduated from many different universities and colleges throughout the US. University of Findlay accounts for 3% of our BSN staff, Wright State about 8%, ONU also about 8% and Bluffton and Defiance about 1%.

The aforementioned universities are meeting MHSR needs for new grads as far as their level of education, we would love to see a higher volume of Bachelor prepared nurses join the Ministry.

Due to COVID19, our need is greater than ever for nurses, especially Bachelor prepared nurses. St. Rita's requires RN's to obtain their bachelors within 5 years of employment if not already completed. The number of openings varies between 40-80 RN vacancies throughout the year, and we are currently sitting toward the top end of that scale. Over the next 3-5 years our vacancies could stay within that same variance as more retirements are coming.

If Rhodes State College were approved to offer a BSN program MHSR would absolutely take a virtually unlimited number of preceptees and provide clinicals as well. The hospital will surely hire as many BSN prepared new graduates as can safely be accommodated.

Thank you for the opportunity to assist in this proposal.

Sincerely,

Alexandra Bowen

Alexandra Luce
Supervisor, Talent Acquisition
Bon Secours Mercy Health
Abowen1@mercy.com
419-261-4711

SMW

Shannon Williams
Director, Talent Acquisition
Bon Secours Mercy Health
SMWilliams1@mercy.com
513-607-1255



Mercer Health

Mercer County Community Hospital

Dr. Cynthia Spiers, President
Rhodes State College
4240 Campus Dr.
Lima, OH 45804

February 5, 2021

Dr. Spiers,

The current status of healthcare workers in the region, state, and nation has been under high scrutiny throughout the past year as COVID preparations were in full swing. It became very evident that healthcare is lacking when trying to manage high patient care demands. Mercer Health quickly discovered that there were not enough quality nurses to manage all of our normal service lines as well as implement new care centers for surge capacity and outpatient operational needs.

We have heavily relied on area universities and colleges to continue to educate new nurses that want to return to their hometown community and serve their family, friends and neighbors. We have seen great success in having a collaborative relationship with Rhodes State College to help provide onsite clinical rotations and future employment opportunities for these individuals.

Rhodes State College continues to provide a comprehensive education program that prepares students for real world experiences. By enhancing their program options, they will only continue to build on their already high quality performers. We have seen an increase over the past 5-10 years on the number of young people that want to pursue a career in either advanced practice care or leadership. Both of these career paths begin by first establishing a bachelor's degree in nursing. By offering the BSN degree close to home, students can begin their professional journey with ease. The trend to access higher degree educational opportunities close to home is also growing.

Mercer Health advocates for hiring BSN nurses. We currently employ over 200 RN's across our organization with an additional 27 advanced practice nurses. We do not currently track this by degree but we do favor hiring a BSN prepared nurse if applicable for service line and availability. We fully support and advocate for Rhodes State College to be awarded this opportunity.

Thank you for the opportunity to assist in the proposal.

Sincerely,

Susan Miller
VP Patient Care Services, Chief Nursing Officer
Mercer Health
smiller@mercer-health.com
419-678-5388

800 West Main Street • Coldwater, Ohio 45828 • Ph: 419-678-2341 • Fx: 419-678-3271
mercer-health.com



February 3, 2121
Dr, Cynthia Spiers, President
Rhodes State College
4240 Campus Drive
Lima, Ohio 45804

Re: Rhodes State College BSN Program

Mary Rutan Hospital is pleased to offer our support to Rhodes State College in your pursuit of a Bachelor's of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree program. Our facility has a long history of supporting the current Associate Degree Program with clinical opportunities as well as hiring program graduates. I myself am a graduate of the program and participated in clinicals at Mary Rutan Hospital as part of my education.

The majority of the nurses hired at Mary Rutan are coming from an AD program and then return to complete their BSN through an online program. In 2020 we hired 19 nurses and six of them had their BSN upon hire. Currently we have nine nursing positions posted while we prefer to hire those with a BSN we do hire AD nurses and encourage them to complete their BSN. Mary Rutan currently offers 100% tuition reimbursement.

Mary Rutan would continue our current relationship with Rhodes State College and would commit to precepting students during their capstone as well as hiring graduates of the program. We would be comfortable with four capstone students each semester if there were students interested in coming to Mary Rutan. We look forward to the potential additional education option for those in our community interested in pursuing a nursing career.

Thank you,

Wendy Rodenberger MS BSN RN NEA-BC
CNO and Vice President of Patient Care
Mary Rutan Hospital
937-599-7006
Wendy.Rodenberger@maryrutan.org

205 Palmer Avenue Bellefontaine, Ohio 43311-2298
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JOINT TOWNSHIP DISTRICT MEMORIAL HOSPITAL™

AN AFFILIATE OF GRAND LAKE HEALTH SYSTEM

April 20, 2021

Dr. Cynthia Spiers, President
Rhodes State College
4240 Campus Drive
Lima, OH 45804

Subject: Letter of Support

Dear Dr. Spiers,

I am writing this letter in support of the Rhodes State College proposal for a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree program in our region. The Grand Lake Health System feels strongly the availability of baccalaureate prepared nurses in our region is not sufficient to meet workforce demand. The Institute of Medicine (IOM) report, "The Future of Nursing: Leading Change, Advancing Health", established a goal of increasing the proportion of nurses with a bachelor's degree to 80 percent by the year of 2020. We are not meeting this goal. As a small rural facility we hire approximately 20 – 30 nurses each year, the majority from Rhodes State College. A Rhodes State nurse graduate wishing to enroll in a BSN completion program has very limited options in the region.

While the prevalence of the baccalaureate degree as a nurse's initial degree has grown, the Ohio Board of Nursing 2019 RN Workforce Data reflects only 37% of Ohio's registered nurses start with a bachelor's degree. In Northwest Ohio, this number is only 27%. Plans to enroll in a baccalaureate program is extremely high (90-96%) among Ohio nurses without a BSN who are 30 years old or younger. But in NW Ohio only 5.3 percent are currently enrolled. While a lack of access to a BSN program may not be a significant barrier at the state level, regionally the available slots for nurses pursuing their BSN are limited. Other reported barriers to a BSN include the ability to balance personal lives and work schedules (17 percent) and high tuition costs (17 percent). Having the availability of a regional, affordable community college program enables non-traditional students to advance their nursing practice.

A baccalaureate prepared nursing workforce is key to our organization's human resource planning and is a critical part of our strategy to meet the health needs of the community. The largest segment of the nursing workforce is employed in a hospital setting. Our health system hosts Rhodes State students in their clinical rotations and hires graduates from Rhodes State into our health system. The attractiveness of our employment proposition and our own competitiveness in the region relies on an available pool of qualified nursing applicants. We depend on this pipeline. The healthcare delivery model of the near future is expected to require educational preparation beyond an Associate Degree for nursing. If the state wishes to be competitive in retaining a talented labor pool in Ohio, then we must develop the kinds of educational opportunities sought by those pursuing high demand career options.

Respectfully,

Lana Hinders, MHA, BSN, RN
Chief Nursing Officer
Joint Township District Memorial Hospital



February 10, 2021

Rhodes State College
Dr. Cynthia Spiers
4240 Campus Drive
Lima, OH 45804

Dear Dr. Spiers:

At Blanchard Valley Health System, our nurses are critical members of the patient care teams within our hospitals, physician practices, and outpatient facilities. While providing compassionate care, our specially trained nursing teams focus on patient safety and care quality - helping patients better understand every step of their care.

The majority of our bachelor prepared nurses come from The University of Findlay and Ohio Northern University. While we recruit both ADN and BSN graduates from a number of institutions in the region, we consistently have more than 50 RN vacancies across the Health System, at any given time.

Not unlike most health systems in Ohio and around the country, Blanchard Valley Health System is challenged to fill these positions due to the number of licensed nurses versus the large number of vacancies. We do not anticipate being able to bring enough nurses into the organization in the next 3-5 years to fully meet our staffing needs.

BVHS has always had a good experience with Rhoads State students and graduates, and would love to offer as much support and accommodations as we able for precepting and hiring upon graduation.

Thank you for the opportunity to support your institution in this new venture. We look forward to employing Rhodes State nursing graduates with a focus on providing patient-centered care in our Health System.

Sincerely,

Kathy Myers, Recruiter
Blanchard Valley Health System
1900 S. Main Street
Findlay, OH 45840



April 21, 2021

Dr. Cynthia Spiers, President
Rhodes State College
4240 Campus Drive
Lima, OH 45804

The Talent Acquisition partners for Mercy Health – Defiance Hospital (MHD) have reviewed your proposal for a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree and are in high support of this initiative. Bachelor prepared nurses have spent more time in the classroom than Associate/Diploma prepared nurses and this allows for the Bachelor prepared nurses to be more prepared to "hit the ground running" when it comes to starting their career.

Due to COVID 19, our need is greater than ever for nurses, especially Bachelor prepared nurses. MHD require RNs obtain their bachelors within 5 years of employment if not already completed. The number of RN vacancies varies throughout the year. Over the next 3-5 years, our vacancies will likely increase as we anticipate multiple retirements.

If Rhodes State College were approved to offer a BSN program, MHD would absolutely take a virtually unlimited number of preceptees and provide clinicals as well. The hospital would surely hire as many BSN prepared new graduates as can safely be accommodated.

Thank you for the opportunity to assist in this proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sonya Selhorst".

Sonya Selhorst BSN, MBA, FACHE
Chief Nursing Officer & Chief Operating Officer
Mercy Health – Defiance Campus