

Testimony before the Senate Workforce & Higher Education Committee

Lima Memorial Health System, Lima, Ohio

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. Ann Pohl, Vice President of Patient Care Services and Chief Nursing Officer at Lima Memorial Health System, in Lima Ohio. We have a critical healthcare shortage of nurses in Northwest Ohio, as well as a need to increase the educational attainment of our current nurses and new hires to the level of a bachelor of science degree. For us, any viable solution starts with allowing our local public two-year college, Rhodes State, to offer the BSN.

I personally earned two degrees from Rhodes State – one in respiratory care and one in nursing. My experience and time spent at Rhodes provided me with a strong foundation for my career in healthcare. It was the knowledge and experiences that I had at Rhodes that served as the catalyst for my pursuits in healthcare education and for going on to earn my Baccalaureate, Masters, and Doctoral degrees in nursing. The quality of the education at Rhodes State is exceptional, and I can truly attest to that even more today, as a Chief Nurse Executive, knowing how many nursing graduates of high quality that we hire from Rhodes State.

As you may already know, the Bureau of Labor Statistics a faster-than-average growth is forecast for nursing. Today, at Lima Memorial, the BSN rate is 54% with only a 40% BSN rate for frontline/direct care staff. This falls short of the Institute of Medicine's goal for 80% by 2020. Five-hundred nurses are employed by Lima Memorial Health System - 25% are over the age of 50 and likely to exit the workforce in the next five to ten years. We will need to hire over 100 new nurses over the next decade, and even if all of them were to hold a BSN degree, that would still leave us with a need for an additional 100 or more of our existing nursing staff to complete their BSN.

Nursing schools across the country are struggling to graduate enough registered nurses to meet the current healthcare demand. The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) has joined forces with schools, policymakers and professional nursing organizations to get ahead of this critical need. The Association notes that one major contribution to the nursing shortage is that there are simply not enough nursing instructors, clinical sites, and classroom space for those wishing to enter the profession.

We, along with many healthcare facilities, have relied heavily on area universities to provide BSN graduates, but many of these graduates return to their hometowns or move to larger cities to serve the health care needs in those locations. Frankly, the high cost of their degree forces many to look for higher pay in a large city. However, our collaborative relationship with Rhodes State College—at much more affordable prices—has shown that their graduates stay in the area. They have the trained faculty; a new, state supported 50,000 square foot facility; and the high end simulation and equipment needed to support today's interdisciplinary teaching and learning.

I have seen first-hand that Rhodes State is agile and can adjust clinical rotations, curriculum, and programs to meet our needs for a highly qualified nursing workforce. We believe that if Rhodes State were enabled to expand their program options to include the BSN and ADN to BSN, we would reap the benefits. The local BSN would also assist students seeking advanced practice care and leadership positions, because all require a BSN. By offering the BSN and ADN to BSN close to home, students can begin their professional journey at an affordable cost.

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It is important for LMHS to invest in our local communities, because they invest in us. Thus, LMHS reimburses tuition for our nurse employees who pursue advanced BSN completion. However, many of them choose online, out of state programs, because they are the most affordable and quick path to a BSN completion program. That is less than ideal because it means we are supporting out of state educational entities. Allowing Rhodes State College to offer a BSN degree locally, enables us to provide advanced training for our nurses at a very affordable cost, and to invest our tuition support into the economic development of our own communities.

In closing, Lima Memorial Health System advocates for and is fully supportive and committed to the implementation of a BSN degree and ADN to BSN completion program at Rhodes State College. We urge your support for SB 135.

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