



OHIO
UNIVERSITY

BEFORE THE SENATE WORKFORCE & HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE

**SENATOR TERRY JOHNSON
CHAIR**

**TESTIMONY
OF
DR. NICOLE PENNINGTON
EXECUTIVE DEAN OF REGIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION
OHIO UNIVERSITY**

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Chair Johnson, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Minority Member Williams, and members of the Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide testimony regarding Substitute Senate Bill 135 specifically addressing the proposed legislation for community colleges to offer RN to BSN (Bachelor of Science in Nursing) programs. My name is Nicole Pennington, and I am currently the Executive Dean for Ohio University's Regional Campuses and Dean of Ohio University's Southern Campus. I am also a tenured nursing faculty member at Ohio University with over 25 years of experience in nursing and I have taught in all nursing degree programs from associate degree to doctorate level. It is truly a pleasure to be here today to advocate for nursing education.

Thank you for working towards providing greater access to higher education for Ohio students. I am certainly here to support that and would like to offer some suggestions as to how we can do that without significantly adding costs by duplicating program offerings. Ohio University has been a strong leader in nursing education for many years, offering the 2-year ADN (Associate Degree Nursing) program at four regional campuses, the traditional 4-year BSN degree at the Athens campus and four of our regional campuses, the RN to BSN program online, and graduate programs from the Athens campus.

There is no doubt the state of Ohio needs a robust system of delivering nursing education to meet the demand for nurses. Offering undergraduate nursing degrees at multiple locations across Ohio is important and greatly needed to attempt to meet the current and upcoming demand for nurses in the healthcare arena. The demand for nurses is not in question, but we still must understand how we can prepare highly competent and skilled nurses at an affordable cost without adding additional programs and creating duplicity.

The School of Nursing (SON) at Ohio University is dedicated to excellence in nursing education. Through the provision of multiple pathways and points of access for careers in nursing, the SON has continually evolved to meet the needs of students and the healthcare workforce while adhering to the mission of preparing nurses whose work reflects the highest standards of collaboration, ethics, innovation, and care. The RN to BSN program track is an online nurse completion program. The program of study builds on previous nursing knowledge and expands that knowledge to a baccalaureate level. Support courses for the program are derived from a breadth of general education courses that support achievement of the program outcomes. It is designed for licensed RNs with courses offered in five-week sessions. RN to BSN courses are based on adult learning principles and the belief that adult students are capable of applying their experiences and knowledge, skills, and attitudes in order to achieve program outcomes.

More than **13,000** nurses have completed their BSN through OU's RN to BSN program since 2012. The three-year aggregate completion average for the BSN program for the cohorts admitted in 2015, 2016, and 2017 is 72.5%. This is 2.5% above the established program benchmark. The program currently has sufficient capacity to enroll students who are interested in completing their BSN. With additional capacity to enroll students in existing programs, there is the opportunity to meet the demand without standing up new

programs. There is also the opportunity to expand capacity in existing programs by adding additional resources which would still be less expensive than creating new programs.

Ohio University's RN to BSN program is offered at a very reasonable tuition rate and fees are significantly less among most comparable public institutions across the nation. A student can complete all required nursing courses (9) for less than \$8000. Nursing courses and other required online courses (7) for which students in the online RN to BSN program may exclusively enroll are offered at a tuition rate of:

- \$240 per credit hour for Ohio residents (rate is a combination of the instructional and the general fees)
- \$243 per credit hour for non-Ohio residents (rate is a combination of the instructional, the general and the nonresident fees)

The resources to run a nursing program are significant compared to many other academic programs. To meet student demand, Ohio University has increased full-time nursing faculty by 100% since 2010-2011. The average cost for one nursing faculty member at the level of an associate professor at Ohio's public institutions is \$88,790. Ohio University currently has 62 Tenure Track, Instructional, and Clinical Faculty to provide a high-quality nursing education. By building on existing resources, it is possible to keep the cost of education delivery down. Nursing programs are expensive to operate. They require many resources in addition to hard-to-find experienced nursing faculty. It is also necessary to have external clinical sites available for students to complete required hands-on training. These sites can be difficult to secure as institutions compete for limited space. Adequate admission services are required as well as advising and academic support services, and let us not forget about the cost of the other support courses other than nursing that must be taught as part of the curriculum. When academic programs are added, these resources must be ramped up as well. When programs are offered in an online format, technical support must also be provided. For traditional undergraduate nursing programs, the cost of clinical labs must be considered. The creation and maintenance of these high fidelity nursing simulation labs can be very costly with the most advanced labs having a price tag in the millions. The overall program costs are significant.

By partnering with established programs, the need to increase the number of BSN prepared nurses can be successfully accomplished. Ohio University currently partners with 20 community colleges within Ohio to do just that. There is the capacity to do more at Ohio University and other existing RN to BSN programs in Ohio. The process is not difficult to create articulations between associate and baccalaureate nursing degree programs. These pathways can be easily created to allow for students to complete their associate degree at one institution and continue a seamless pathway to complete their baccalaureate degree at an institution that already has an existing degree program. This is what we are already doing as a cost saving measure for higher education in Ohio. Through collaborative partnerships, you can use existing resources without having to hire significant numbers of new nursing faculty members to run a new program that will also have costs associated with accreditation.

What I am proposing is instead of putting financial resources towards duplicating programs when existing programs have capacity, please consider the opportunity to add

resources to those programs that are already well established. Add funding so that they can continue to build their nursing faculty and all of the resources that are required to deliver a high-quality nursing program. We need well educated and competent nurses. I strongly believe that we can meet the demand by establishing strong partnerships with existing programs at an affordable price point for students.

Thank you so much for your time in allowing me to share this information on behalf of Ohio University.