

Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Ohio Senate Workforce and Higher Education Committee, my name is Dr. Peggy Mark, and I am System Vice President and Chief Nursing Officer at Premier Health. I appreciate the opportunity to provide interested party testimony today to this esteemed committee and to discuss critical issues facing our healthcare workforce that will dramatically impact the public health of our community and our entire state.

Premier Health is a healthcare system, operating hospitals at five sites of service and provides a large physician network offering primary and specialty care, along with home health services and behavioral health services throughout the Dayton region. We are one of the largest employers in our region with more than 13,000 employees. Our mission is to build healthier communities and our greatest impact is by far on the health and well-being of the tens of thousands of patients we serve each year.

Our responsibility is to ensure a workforce that is not only compassionate but is also excellently trained. The strength of an organization is linked to the people they employ. As we provide much needed and accessible healthcare services, the quality of our workforce is linked to the number of lives we save and the quality of life we can impact for our patients. This is, of course, serious business and we are passionate about the discourse we are involved in today.

One of the most serious challenges facing Premier Health, and often shared by hospitals across the state and across the country, is a dire shortage of nurses both now and in the projected future. We need more registered nurses, along with those with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree. This is a current need

and will remain constant for the foreseeable future. Simply put, all institutions of higher education need to train dramatically more nurses than we currently have today.

The legislation under consideration today would permit community colleges to offer BSN degrees through a change in Ohio statute. We have long standing and valued relationships and work extremely well with our area's universities and with our area's community colleges – Sinclair Community College in particular. We estimate that roughly 20% of our nurses graduated from Sinclair. We are extremely happy with the quality of the nurses they produce – we just need more of them and we need more BSN nurses as well. Additionally, we also need a better pipeline of nurses from diverse communities – again, this is an area where Sinclair excels. However, it is abundantly clear that our current course – even with world class partnerships – will not be enough to fill our growing workforce needs.

In late 2019, it was estimated that 29% of the RNs with an active license in Ohio were over the age of 55. Of those RN's, 70% or approximately 14,000 RNs indicated that they were employed in nursing. We know the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic is having on our nursing workforce, with many deciding to retire early, leave the bedside, or leave the profession entirely. Maintaining the right number of competent nurses is essential to achieving positive patient outcomes. We are counting on our academic partners to help us fill this critical gap.

Again, we cannot stress the urgency of this situation strongly enough nor can we overstate that continuing on our current trajectory is unacceptable. While the

proposed measure under consideration is a serious one, and worthy of serious discussion, we urge this committee and policy makers across our state to consider all measures necessary to provide the State of Ohio with the supply of BSN nurses we need so that we can continue providing the care our communities expect and deserve.