



April 20, 2023

Chairman Al Cutrona
Ohio House of Representatives
Health Provider Services Committee

Chairman Cutrona, Vice-Chair Gross, Ranking Member Somani, and esteemed members of the House Health Provider Services Committee:

We are excited to be allowed the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 102 "License Advanced Practice Respiratory Therapists."

My name is Karen S. McCoy, and I am a pediatric pulmonary specialist practicing at Nationwide Children's Hospital for almost 40 years. Along with my colleagues Laura Evans and Erin Wishloff, who have been practicing pediatric respiratory therapists for 30 and 15 years respectively, we are eager to provide testimony to the committee. Pediatric pulmonologists specialize in diseases of the lungs and diagnose and treat many respiratory diseases including asthma, pneumonia, cystic fibrosis and lung and breathing conditions of premature infants.¹ Respiratory therapists are educated, trained and licensed professionals who employ scientific principles to identify, treat and prevent acute or chronic dysfunction of the cardiopulmonary system.²

By 2030, the United States expects a shortage of 1,300 to 12,000 cardiologists and pulmonologists.³ This alarming prediction becomes more concerning, given the fact that The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention identifies three of the top five leading causes of death in the US as diseases of the cardiopulmonary system.² The impact and complexity of cardiopulmonary healthcare is rising and predicted to continue to rise, yet access to expert providers is diminished⁴. This shortage is even more dire in rural areas where there may not be a single qualified provider for advanced cardiopulmonary management in a whole county. In such a situation, individuals of all ages could die before life-saving treatments are performed. As a group we have been in this field for a combined 80+ years, have witnessed the need for more specialized care increase greatly. We believe that measures to counter this situation are needed before this situation reaches crisis proportions.

There is a way to make an impact on the care we provide and that is with the help of Advanced Practice Respiratory Therapists (APRT). The APRT is a new professional who is a non-physician advanced practice provider of respiratory therapy with an advanced degree (at least a master's degree) and completion of a curriculum equivalent to other advanced practice providers in Ohio, such as Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) or Physician Assistants (PAs). The clinical training in this program has been provided at Nationwide Children's Hospital and the Ohio State University Medical Center. This new provider would be an asset in helping with efficient and thorough management of children with complex cardiopulmonary conditions and access to care in many arenas we serve including critical care, sleep medicine, anesthesiology and in our pulmonary division. One specific population for which we provide care, patients with tracheostomies and on a home ventilator support, will benefit greatly from the knowledge and skill level the APRT would have. The demand for hospital beds has increased in general, from the public health emergency and the usual virally triggered acute illnesses occurring each year. Since children with chronic trach/ventilator needs must be placed in critical care beds in the hospital, these beds are unavailable to other very sick infants and children. As you may know there were times through the 2022-23 viral surge, **when there were few pediatric hospital beds in the state of Ohio.**⁵ This is dangerous, puts extra stress on other hospital settings, such as the Emergency Department, which had to board patients for



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hours or even days, before a bed was available. In some patients it was necessary to provide air transport to hospitals outside of Ohio.

With the APRT, this new professional, many such chronically ventilated children could be kept safe and receive care needed at home and avoid exposure to hospital acquired infection. In many instances, this would relieve our ICU care beds for more appropriate and efficient use. There is a compelling need to have a specialized provider, such as the APRT, helping patients move through the healthcare continuum in both inpatient and outpatient spaces.

While my practice is largely pediatric, the need we describe pertains to all ages and many locations across the country. I see the need not only for a provider to fill identified gaps in care of cardiopulmonary patients in the state of Ohio, but it will also provide a path for professional growth and advancement. It provides a clinical ladder for current respiratory therapists (very valued and in short supply) in the field, similar to a registered nurse who becomes an advanced practice nurse (APN). We have had multiple respiratory therapists from our institution enroll and graduate from the Master's of Respiratory Therapy (MRT) program at The Ohio State University, **the first accredited program in the country**. We have also had many therapists leave the field to pursue advanced practice roles and this would be a path for them to stay in the cardiopulmonary field and contribute their knowledge and skills at a higher provider level. We believe this new profession will help us make headway in the quality of care that we provide so much so, that we are the only pediatric clinical site for training and developing these students. We anxiously await the approval legislation which allows them to contribute at the advanced practice level.

We strongly recommend that the House Health Services Provider Committee support HB 102 as introduced to license advanced practice respiratory therapists. It will help to avert a crisis now and in the future. Thank you Chair Cutrona and members of the committee for the opportunity to provide testimony.

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