



Proponent Testimony for APRT Bill

June 6, 2023

Chairman Cutrona, Vice-Chair Gross, Ranking Member Somani, and esteemed members of the House Health Provider Services Committee, the Ohio Society for Respiratory Care appreciates the opportunity to testify today in support of HB 102 “License Advanced Practice Respiratory Therapists.” My name is Sarah Varekojis, and I am a member of the Ohio Society for Respiratory Care legislative committee. I am also a professor and the Director of Clinical Education for the Advanced Practice Respiratory Therapist graduate education program at The Ohio State University, and I am honored to serve as the Commission on Accreditation for Respiratory Care President-Elect.

In 2012, my faculty colleagues and I conducted a state-wide survey to determine the need for advanced practice respiratory therapists at the urging of our Advisory Committee that includes hiring managers and pulmonary, critical care and sleep physicians. The Advisory Committee felt there was a growing need for an advanced level respiratory therapists to support cardiopulmonary patient needs. The Ohio needs assessment found 62% of respondents (managers and physicians) indicated a current need for APRTs. This needs assessment informed the development of a Master of Respiratory Therapy (MRT) graduate program at OSU. We received approval for the MRT program from the University Board of Trustees in 2016 and the Chancellor’s Council on Graduate Studies within the Ohio Department of Higher Education in 2017.

In June 2020, the American Association for Respiratory Care’s (AARC) journal *Respiratory Care* published: “Physician Support for Non-Physician Advanced Practice Provider for Persons with Cardiopulmonary Disease.”⁴ This national survey of 1401 physicians trained to treat cardiopulmonary disorders, including specialists in sleep, pulmonology, critical care, allergy and immunology, pediatrics, and anesthesiology, demonstrated that 68% agreed or strongly agreed that there is a current need for a non-physician advanced practice provider with cardiopulmonary expertise. Seventy-four percent (74%) agreed or strongly agreed there is a future need for such a provider. Both the state-wide needs assessment and the national needs assessment supported the Advisory Committee’s belief that there was a gap in availability of care for patients with cardiopulmonary disease.

The Commission on Accreditation for Respiratory Care is the leading respiratory therapy education accreditation organization, and accredits entry to practice, degree advancement and Advanced Practice Respiratory Therapy education programs at all levels. The Accreditation Standards for Advanced Practice Programs in Respiratory Care were initially adopted by 2014, and have been revised and updated three times. The Standards are designed to prepare APRTs to function as part of a physician-led care team to provide diagnostic, therapeutic, critical care and preventive care services in inpatient and outpatient across the health care spectrum.

The APRT educational program at OSU received provisional accreditation from CoARC in 2019. The first student cohort was admitted to this program in January 2020 and graduated in May 2021. A second cohort

graduated in 2022, and a third will graduate in May 2023. These students received clinical education under the mentorship of pulmonary, sleep, and critical care physician faculty at The OSU Wexner Medical Center and Nationwide Children's Hospital. Their didactic, laboratory and clinical education is equivalent to the education other advanced practice providers in Ohio, including several courses they are co-enrolled in with advanced practice nursing students. The APRT program graduate is prepared to provide advanced, evidence-based, diagnostic and therapeutic clinical practice and disease management under the leadership of a physician. None of the APRT program graduates are able to practice in Ohio without licensure.

Of note, recently, the Veteran's Administration Maryland Health Care System (VAMHCS) approved the hiring of APRTs to address its shortage of pulmonary and sleep physicians and the challenges to access to care this has created. The VAMHCS is a federal entity which hires health care providers independent of state licensure. One OSU APRT program graduate has accepted employment with VAMHCS, and one other is expected to be employed in the near future.

On behalf of the APRT program graduates and the pulmonary, critical care and sleep physicians that have indicated a need for and an interest in hiring APRTs, I would encourage the House Health Services Provider Committee support HB 102 as introduced to license advanced practice respiratory therapists.

Thank you Chair Cutrona and members of the committee for the opportunity to provide testimony.

References:

¹Joyner RL, Strickland SL, et. al. Adequacy of the Provider Workforce for Persons with Cardiopulmonary Disease. CHEST (2019); 157(5): 1221-1229.

²Merritt Hawkins White Paper Series: Physician Supply Considerations: The Emerging Shortage of Medical Specialists" (2017)

³IHS Markit, The Complexities of Physician Supply and Demand 2020: Projections from 2018 to 2033. Prepared for the Association of American Medical Colleges, Washington, DC.

⁴Strickland SL, Varekojis SM, et.al. Physician Support for Non-Physician Advanced Practice Providers for Persons with Cardiopulmonary Disease. Resp Care (2020); 65(11) 1702-1711.

⁵ VA Reference: <https://www.aarc.org/an23-the-advanced-practice-respiratory-therapist-gets-a-big-boost-from-the-va-in-maryland/>