

Senate Health Committee
Senator Stephen A. Huffman, Chair
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SB 149 – Proponent Testimony – Written Only
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Chairman Huffman, Vice-Chair Johnson, Ranking Member Liston, and members of the Senate Health Committee, my name is Dave Maxwell, and I am a licensed respiratory therapist practicing in Ohio. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today in strong support of SB 149 - the proposed legislation to establish a Respiratory Care Interstate Compact (RCIC) in our state.

As a respiratory therapist, I have witnessed the critical role our profession plays across a broad spectrum of healthcare settings. From managing complex critical care cases in hospitals to providing education and support in outpatient and home health environments, respiratory therapists are indispensable. The demand for respiratory care services has surged in recent years due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the increasing prevalence of chronic lung diseases such as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), asthma, and other pulmonary conditions.

Our expertise also extends to neonatal care, where we are frontline responders for premature infants, whose underdeveloped lungs and respiratory systems require immediate and specialized care. These infants often rely on respiratory therapists for interventions that can mean the difference between life and death.

Despite this, our profession faces a troubling workforce shortage, leaving many patients - particularly those in underserved and rural areas - without access to timely, high-quality respiratory care. This shortage highlights the urgent need for innovative solutions like the RCIC.

Why the RCIC Is Critical

The Respiratory Care Interstate Compact would create a streamlined licensure system, allowing licensed respiratory therapists in participating states to obtain compact privileges and practice across state lines without the administrative delays and costs of applying for multiple state licenses.

Benefits of the RCIC

1. Enhanced Access to Care

- o The RCIC would improve access to skilled respiratory therapists for patients in underserved and rural areas.
- o In public health emergencies, the Compact would enable rapid deployment of respiratory therapists to areas of greatest need, saving lives and reducing strain on local healthcare systems.

2. Workforce Flexibility

- o The RCIC simplifies licensure portability for therapists relocating for personal or professional reasons, including military families, ensuring continuity of their practice.
- o It also opens new career opportunities, improving job satisfaction and retention in the profession.

3. Continuity of Care

o Patients and providers who relocate across state lines would experience fewer disruptions in care, ensuring seamless transitions.

4. Administrative Efficiency

o By reducing the burden of maintaining multiple licenses, the RCIC allows respiratory therapists to dedicate more time to patient care and less to administrative tasks.

Addressing Patient Needs

The respiratory care workforce shortage has long been a challenge, made more acute by the pandemic. Respiratory therapists were stretched to their limits, with some states relying on emergency measures to meet patient needs. These temporary fixes underscore the need for a sustainable, permanent solution like the RCIC.

Patients with chronic lung diseases, such as COPD, not only need treatment but also education and support to manage their conditions and improve their quality of life. Expanding access to respiratory therapists through the RCIC directly addresses these unmet needs and helps reduce healthcare disparities.

Proven Success

The RCIC follows the model of successful interstate compacts for nurses and physical therapists, which have improved licensure portability and expanded access to care across states.

Conclusion

Passing this legislation would position our state as a leader in tackling healthcare workforce challenges while prioritizing patient access to skilled care. The RCIC is strongly supported by the Ohio Society for Respiratory Care and the American Association for Respiratory Care (AARC), professional organizations dedicated to advancing the field of respiratory care and promoting the interests of respiratory therapists nationwide. I urge this committee to support the RCIC legislation and help ensure all patients have access to the critical respiratory care they need. Thank you for your attention to this important issue. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

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