

Ohio House of Representatives / Health Committee
Hearing on House Bill 196 (Surgical Assistants)
Proponent Testimony of Brenda Poynter
Professor and Director of Surgical Assisting Programs, University of Cincinnati

May 11, 2021

Good morning Chair Lipps, Vice Chair Holmes, Ranking Member Russo, and members of the Ohio House Health Committee. My name is Brenda Poynter and I am a Certified Surgical First Assistant (CSFA), as well as a Professor and Program Director at UC Clermont College in Batavia, Ohio for the Surgical Technology and Surgical Assisting programs. I teach full-time and practice on an “as needed” basis at a Surgery Center in Cincinnati. I have worked in the operating room for 34 years, 26 in the role of Surgical Assistant. For many reasons I will describe to you today, I am testifying in support of HB 196 and the licensure for Surgical Assistants in the State of Ohio.

The surgical assistant profession has grown significantly over the last several decades and it will continue to grow as insurance companies reduce reimbursements for procedures. The number of individuals taking the CSFA exam tripled from 2008 (300) to 2018 (880). There are currently over 7,000 individuals certified in the field of Surgical Assisting in the U.S. and a little over 420 are here in the state of Ohio. Unfortunately, there is currently no mechanism in this state for tracking these professionals or assuring all surgical assistant practitioners are properly trained to care for patients.

Surgical Assistants work in the operating room where the majority of caregivers—including the surgeon, anesthesiologist, and circulating RN—are all licensed. Surgical Assistants are responsible for assisting in positioning a patient, making secondary incisions, clamping and tying blood vessels, providing exposure of a surgical site, closing wounds, securing dressings/drains, and splinting/casting limbs for orthopedic surgical procedures. All of these tasks require specialized skills and an in-depth knowledge of anatomy and physiology, as well as a robust understanding of the steps of each surgical procedure.

Furthermore, HB 196 is designed to place minimal burden on those practicing in the field of Surgical Assisting. It provides accommodations for the hospitals in rural areas to apply for an exemption and for those actively practicing in the field to qualify for licensure automatically. Many of the hospitals in Ohio pursue Magnet status for optimal reimbursement from the insurance companies. To achieve this status a hospital must assure all employees are certified in their role, so the majority of those practicing as a Surgical Assistant already have formal training and certification.

The requirement of Continuing Education Units (CEUs) for the license would also place minimal burden on most of the existing Surgical Assistants, while assuring those practicing are staying abreast of the continuously advancing techniques and procedures in the operating

room. Hospitals and instrument/product representatives often provide free CEUs for the medical staff, so those could qualify toward licensure requirements. All Surgical Assistants, certified or not, are eligible to attend the bi-annual conferences and other CEU programs offered by the Associations of Surgical Assistants.

There are currently fourteen CAAHEP accredited programs for surgical assisting; two are in Ohio and four are online. The future students of Surgical Assisting have several options to pursue the profession. As a board member for the Accreditation Review Council on Surgical Technology/Surgical Assisting (ARCSTSA), which performs continuous reviews of all the accredited programs, I can assure you they go through a rigorous process to achieve accreditation and maintain that status. The programs meet minimal expectation to assure a student not only receives the textbook education, but also is able to demonstrate the hands-on skills necessary to perform the tasks of a Surgical Assistant. The ARCSTSA accepts achievement of the CSFA and CSA credential as a positive outcome for a program and programs must demonstrate at least a 70% first-attempt exam pass rate to remain in good standing with their accreditation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I would be happy to answer any questions.