

BEFORE THE SENATE GOVERNMENT OVERSIGHT & REFORM COMMITTEE

**SENATOR KRISTINA ROEGNER
CHAIR**

**TESTIMONY
OF
BRUCE JOHNSON
PRESIDENT
INTER-UNIVERSITY COUNCIL OF OHIO**

MARCH 24, 2021

The Public Universities of Ohio

The University of Akron
University of Cincinnati
Miami University
Ohio University
Wright State University

Bowling Green State University
Cleveland State University
Northeast Ohio Medical University
Shawnee State University
Youngstown State University

Central State University
Kent State University
The Ohio State University
The University of Toledo

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair McColley, Ranking Minority Member Craig, and members of the Senate Government Oversight & Reform Committee, thank you for allowing me to provide written proponent testimony today in support of House Bill 6 on behalf of the state's fourteen public universities, all of which are members of the Inter-University Council of Ohio (IUC). My name is Bruce Johnson, and I am the President of the IUC.

The IUC was established in 1939 as a voluntary educational association of Ohio's public universities. It is committed to ensuring affordable opportunities for the more than 300,000 students attending our member institutions without sacrificing the quality of their education or experience.

From our perspective, House Bill 6 is a straightforward and necessary piece of legislation. The IUC presented proponent testimony on this bill in both the House and Senate last General Assembly when it was House Bill 673. It was pending a Senate floor vote after being favorably reported by the Senate General Government and Agency Review Committee, but time ran out before that vote could be taken when the Legislature adjourned in December. We thank Representative Roemer for his persistence on this issue and his reintroduction of the bill.

The two provisions in the bill of interest to the IUC and that we are testifying in support of are: one, the language continuing until July 1, 2021, the suspension of the requirement that an applicant pass a licensure examination to receive a license to practice as a registered nurse or licensed practical nurse; and, two, the language requiring a plan to be developed that provides students in educator preparation programs with alternative experiences because they may have missed out on other opportunities due to COVID-19 health orders.

We support the temporary nursing licensure language because the state continues to see new COVID cases and hospitalizations. The good news is those numbers have been declining and may be stabilizing, but we are not out of the woods yet, and this legislation remains timely. Our hospital systems are still under pressure and staff are quickly reaching the limit of their endurance after a year of constant, continuous cases. The front-line healthcare workers, doctors, and nurses who see these incoming cases daily could use the additional support and some relief.

Ohio's public universities can help, and this bill would give us that opportunity. Last Spring Semester, our state universities produced 6,506 graduates with an associate degree, bachelor's degree, doctoral degree, or professional degree in a variety of healthcare fields and professions. At the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, many of our nursing students were negatively impacted, especially those who were nearing graduation and initially lost the ability to do clinical work at hospitals. However, with the enactment of House Bill 197, which took effect on March 27, 2020, a great degree of flexibility was granted that led to more nurses, graduates of our public universities, being placed in the workforce in greater numbers. It enabled them to get right into the fight against the virus more quickly and in some cases, after graduation but prior to being officially licensed by the Board of Nursing.

Now, almost a year later, we find ourselves in a similar situation. House Bill 6 would give us the same tools and flexibility going into this spring and summer and it would do so by extending the expiration date established in the previous legislation. The sponsor clearly recognizes the value of those individuals, our graduates, in the fight against COVID-19. The need for their assistance is still great.

The IUC supports the language in the bill requiring that to be eligible to practice on a temporary nursing license, the license holder must not have previously taken and failed the licensure exam, been convicted of, pleaded guilty to, or had a judicial finding of guilt for any felony, or failed a drug test as determined by the Nursing Board and to immediately void the license for any violation of those standards. We believe this to be an important individual accountability measure that will help ensure quality of care.

Finally, we support the House amendments making an individual ineligible for a temporary nursing license if the applicant graduated from a nursing education program more than two years before submitting a license application and voiding a temporary nursing license if the license holder fails to take the licensing examination within 60 days after receiving authorization to test. These additional safeguards make the bill better.

The IUC also supports the language in the bill requiring educator preparation program approved under section 3333.048 of the Revised Code to develop and implement a plan to provide its students with alternative experiences, assignments, or instruction in the 2021-2022 academic year to make up any hours or weeks of clinical experiences, including field experiences, student teaching, and internship placements, that the students miss due to the Director of Health's order under section 3701.13 of the Revised Code.

We appreciate the sponsor's desire for fairness and flexibility and his willingness to introduce legislation to tackle the unpredictable and unforeseen consequences of trying to educate public university students to become teachers during a global pandemic by reducing or removing regulatory barriers. Doing so goes a long way towards ensuring Ohio's public universities can provide a high-quality, high-value education to the students we serve – and that ultimately benefits the students they will teach. It also will help ensure students can take full advantage of the opportunities available to them.

To effectively use the knowledge and skills gained through one's education for the benefit of others is something we hope all our graduates will be able to experience. Even if that happens before being officially licensed, as would be the case for the nursing graduates. House Bill 6 would facilitate that goal, making it easier for our students to get the training they need now and to join the workforce as soon as possible and to be the best they can be.

We support the continuation of these policies and the flexibility granted by this legislation for our students studying to become teachers and our nursing graduates. Chair Roegner and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of House Bill 6.