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Chairman Huffman, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Antonio and Members of the Senate Health Committee:

My name is Jennifer Pennock, and I am the Associate Director of Government Affairs for the Association of periOperative Registered Nurses (AORN). I write today in support of HB 161.

AORN, our members and surgical team supporters have been working in states across the country to enact legislation that would ensure that facilities use the surgical smoke evacuation equipment most of them already have to protect the health and safety of their employees and patients. To date, legislation has been enacted in Rhode Island, Colorado, Kentucky, Oregon, and Illinois and introduced in states across the country to overwhelming and bipartisan support. We are pleased to see the Ohio Senate Health Committee take up SB 161.

Like cigarette smoke, surgical smoke can be seen and smelled. Unlike cigarette smoke, surgical smoke is still prevalent in employee workplaces like the operating room. In the room where they are saving lives, healthcare workers in the OR can be exposed daily to toxic surgical smoke that may contain live viruses, toxic chemicals and blood fragments that are hazardous to the health of everyone in the room.

Many agencies and organizations recognize surgical smoke as hazardous but there still are no nationally or Ohio statewide enforceable standards requiring the control and evacuation of surgical smoke. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and The Joint Commission have all recommended the use of engineering controls to essentially eliminate occupational exposure to surgical smoke inhalation, but the recommendations are not requirements.

Many surgical facilities in Ohio do evacuate surgical smoke during some procedures, but few facilities evacuate consistently during all-smoke generating procedures. They are not required by law to use the surgical smoke evacuation equipment they already have available.

The Ohio Senate Health Committee must pass SB 161. AORN stands ready to work with the Committee and the entire Ohio legislature to ensure that harmful surgical smoke is evacuated in facilities across Ohio to protect the health and safety of the healthcare workers saving lives every day.