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Senate Elementary and Secondary Education Committee
SB 223
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Chairman Brenner, Vice Chair Blessing, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Senate Primary and Secondary Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit a written statement supporting SB 233.

I am pleased that SB 233 would reinstate language requiring school nurses to obtain a license from the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), in addition to earning a RN license, to practice as a school nurse. This requirement was removed by HB 442, signed into law on December 22, 2020 and effective April 12, 2021. While I understand the policy enacted in HB 442 was designed to streamline licensure processes in the state, reinstatement of this requirement will protect the health, safety, and academic success of school children across the state of Ohio.

The following are key reasons for ODE licensure of school nurses.

The practice of School Nursing requires specialty preparation beyond the pre-licensure program of study. Baccalaureate nursing programs prepare students for a generalist, not a specialty, role as noted below:

- School Nursing is a specialized practice with its own scope and standards of practice (ANA & NASN, 2017) requiring specific educational preparation that extends beyond a baccalaureate degree to practice independently in a non-traditional health care setting.
- Basic preparation for an RN is regulated by the State Boards of Nursing and in Ohio this is identified under Ohio Rev. Code 4723-5. The standards are based on pre-licensure programs with curricula established in baccalaureate degree, associate degree or diploma programs. The Ohio Board of Nursing does not require a baccalaureate in nursing nor is there a requirement to include curricula specific to School Nurse practice in pre-licensure preparation.
- Nurses licensed in the State of Ohio may have attended programs that were baccalaureate degree, associate degree, or diploma programs. The baccalaureate completion programs were designed to prepare nurses at a generalist level based as an extension of education needed from associate or diploma to baccalaureate. Those standards are based on a generalist preparation and do not address School Nurse practice or competency.

- Educational preparation for nursing varies greatly across the nation for baccalaureate degree, associate degree and diploma programs and those nursing programs may or may not be accredited by the three accrediting bodies in the United States - Commission on Collegiate Nursing Education (CCNE), Commission for Nursing Education Accreditation (CNEA), or Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing (ACEN). This creates a vast difference in educational preparation and lack of standardization if the program in which the student attended for baccalaureate preparation was not accredited.

Undergraduate education does not prepare students with the knowledge, skills and dispositions to provide comprehensive school health care. The following areas needed for competent school nurse practice are **not** included and emphasized in nursing pre-licensure programs:

- A comprehensive foundation of the knowledge, skills and dispositions to work in an educational setting without the structure that nurses in acute care settings have to support their practice.
- Specifics about the challenges encompassing the interplay of child health, development and learning, health management within school systems, educational law related to health services, collaboration related to student evaluation and intervention services, leadership, and required health education are not topics or experiences covered in accredited nursing programs in Ohio, because these are specialty practice areas appropriate for post-baccalaureate RNs.
- The laws and practices specific to working in the school setting.
- The opportunity to collaborate and work on the interprofessional school support teams.
- Experiences to be “leaders who bridge health care and education, provide care coordination, advocate for quality student-centered care, and collaborate to design systems that allow individuals and communities to develop their full potential” ([NASN Board of Directors, 2017](#)).
- A supervised field experience in the school setting that requires meeting the standards outlined in the ANA & NASN (2017) School Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice and the Ohio Educator Licensure [Standards for School Nurse Professional Pupil Services Licensure](#) (2010).

The requirements for eligibility to apply for an ODE registration as a School Nurse are inadequate for the expectations of performance of School Nursing according to state and national standards. The following are examples to illustrate this point:

- There is no requirement for nursing experience prior to completing the registration process for ODE registration as a School Nurse which is contrary to Ohio Educator Standards for professional school practice.
- RNs with the ODE registration as a School Nurse will lack the essential skills and content knowledge needed to ensure the health and safety of students and the school community. In addition, there has been no opportunity to determine if they possess the appropriate dispositions to advance health care for the vulnerable and often underserved population of children in grades K-12 throughout the state.

Expected and documented outcomes of the presence of appropriately prepared School Nurses demand that Ohio continue to be a leader in advancing student health and learning outcomes.

- Ohio and national data from the [National School Health Data Set: Every Student Counts](#) demonstrate student health and academic outcomes improve with a Professional (licensed) School Nurse. Students have improved attendance rates and increased seat time in the classroom when an ODE licensed School Nurse is providing services in the school, when compared to RNs without the ODE license, Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN), and Unlicensed Assistive Personnel (UAP), such as secretaries or health aids.

- RN's who obtains ODE registration as a School Nurse will have a gap in the education needed to fulfill the role of the School Nurse. They will also lack the professional oversight by university faculty which ensures their competence in practice and meeting the Ohio Educator and the School Nurse standards.

In closing, professional standards serve a purpose, as do licensure and certification. We are asking you to reconsider licensure to protect the health and safety of Ohio's students and promote the professional standards for which the licensed School Nurse stands. School nurses must have an ODE Pupil Services license to be recognized for having the knowledge, skills and dispositions considered essential for the highly qualified School Nurse and the right choice to oversee the overall health and well-being among children in Ohio schools. The licensed School Nurse, the RN with a baccalaureate degree who has completed an approved program of study in school nursing, has the potential to decrease further disparities in health and education amongst vulnerable children and to increase health and educational outcomes for all of Ohio's children.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.