Senate Bill 121 – Proponent Testimony

Senate Education Committee   
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Chair Lehner, Vice Chair Terhar, Ranking Member Fedor, and members of the Ohio Senate Education Committee, thank you for having me here today to speak in support of Senate Bill 121, which would allow for the adoption of health education standards for public schools in Ohio. My name is Roopa Thakur, and I am a pediatric primary care physician for Cleveland Clinic Children’s.

Cleveland Clinic is committed to improving population health through engaging with the community. School-based health education will be integral to teaching children to make healthy choices to advocate for a healthier community. This is why Cleveland Clinic is supportive of the passage of Senate Bill 121, so that schools in Ohio may adopt the national health education standards.

If adopted, the national health education standards would be integral to efforts in population health management. Population health represents a shift in focus from managing illness outcomes in individuals to preventive measures that can improve health outcomes in an entire community. This is achieved by targeting modifiable upstream factors that influence our population’s health, such as establishing healthy eating/activity habits or eliminating smoke exposure. While these recommendations can be addressed at yearly physicals, not every person has access to a medical home. Furthermore, having just one touch point with a medical professional during the year is often insufficient to create sustained behavioral changes. School-based health care and health education in the classroom are key components of delivering these healthcare messages effectively and repeatedly to the populations that do not enter our offices.

Population health requires gaining an understanding of our patient populations, factors that affect their health risks, and community resources that can mitigate these risks. Once these factors are understood, they can be manipulated by coaching patients to develop decision-making, goal-setting, and communication skills to promote health-enhancing behaviors. Societal norms consistent with healthy behaviors must be reinforced through the advocacy skills developed in these standards. By encouraging our school districts to implement this comprehensive curriculum, we will provide our children with the skills and knowledge to be healthy adults.

Cleveland Clinic School-Based Health Clinics (SBHC) currently engage our school-based populations in six districts in Northeast Ohio. Seven school districts have been served by our mobile unit over the past four years, and we look forward to the addition of a second mobile unit to serve Cleveland Metropolitan Schools District (CMSD) this academic year.

In 2018, Cleveland Clinic opened an in-school clinic at Lakewood High School, providing medical and mental health services to Lakewood’s students and staff. Our SBHC advanced practice providers (APPs) collaborate with the student’s primary care physician to help close healthcare gaps, including age appropriate health screenings and vaccinations. In addition, our APPs regularly educate school staff and students on health recommendations, such as sexual health and puberty talks. Mobile unit staff also provide a variety of health updates at annual Back to School events, including bike safety education. Our mobile unit has engaged in five Council for Economic Opportunities in Greater Cleveland (CEOGC) Head Start events, providing lead screening services to over 100 children and education to over 130 parents in the community.

The efforts of Cleveland Clinic SBHC are part of an organizational movement toward increased community engagement around preventive health education. The Cleveland Clinic Office of Community Relations has conducted cooking demonstrations in neighborhood schools, and has engaged students in a summer Worldwide Classroom education series on health topics related to the basic sciences. Our staff has conducted HPV and personal hygiene talks at local health fairs. Our pediatric residents participate in reading and self-esteem programs in local elementary schools, as well preschool screenings at the Early Learning Center of the YWCA of Greater Cleveland. Our colleagues in psychiatry offer school-based mental health services, including a Transition Bridge Program to assist teenagers with reentry to school after hospitalization for depression.

Once again, Cleveland Clinic voices its support for the passage of SB 121, and is thankful to its sponsors, Senator Sykes and Senator Kunze. Thank you, I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.