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BEFORE THE SENATE GENERAL GOVERNMENT & AGENCY REVIEW COMMITTEE

**SENATOR KIRK SCHURING
CHAIR**

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

DECEMBER 1, 2020

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

Chairman Schuring, Vice Chair Rulli, Ranking Minority Member O'Brien and members of the Senate General Government and Agency Review Committee. Thank you for allowing me to provide proponent testimony today in support of House Bill 673 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 329,000 students attending our member institutions without sacrificing the quality of their education or experience.

From our perspective, House Bill 673 as passed by the House is a straightforward and necessary piece of legislation. Of particular interest to the IUC, it continues 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. As COVID cases continue to increase and hospitalizations continue to rise this fall and winter, the legislation is timelier than ever. Our hospital systems are once again under tremendous pressure – as are the front-line workers, doctors, and nurses who see these incoming cases daily.

But Ohio's public universities can help, and this bill would permit us the opportunity to do so. Just this past 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. And fall semester will be ending soon, producing another batch of graduates who are ready and willing to step into the breach.

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, 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, nearly eight months later, we find ourselves in an almost identical situation and House Bill 673 would give us the same tools and flexibility we need at this critical time 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 appreciates 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 in the midst of 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 – whether they are studying to become teachers or nurses. 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 these nursing graduates. House Bill 673 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.

On a final note, the IUC also supports the change added as a House floor amendment 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.

We support the continuation of these policies and the flexibility granted by this legislation. Thank you Chairman Schuring and members of the committee for the opportunity to speak in support of House Bill 673.