



Chairman Johnson, Vice Chairman Cirino, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Senate Workforce & Higher Education Committee, my name is Gary Barber and I am the Director of Workforce Development at Washington State Community College (WSCC) located in Marietta. I come before you today enlisting your support of Senate Bill 135, and to amplify the concerns of local employers. I work with them daily in my role at the college, and can confirm that this legislation is desperately needed by our workforce partners, including our region's largest employer, Memorial Health System.

Two members of this committee have directly served in the healthcare industry and are aware that in order to address the critical shortage of health care workers, policies need to be modified. Prior to the pandemic, the healthcare industry had just one-quarter of the workers needed to care for the aging Baby-Boomer population. The workforce was further strained by the pandemic. Many nurses who were close to retirement or immunocompromised decided to retire and left the industry. In a recent conversation with Memorial Health System, CEO Scott Cantley explained why the need for BSN's continues to rise, even with a declining population in Appalachia. Cantley explained that Southeast Ohio has one of the most elderly populations in the entire nation, as confirmed by US census data. This is compounded by a 26.6% poverty rate, compared to the 13.1% state average, which will accelerate our need for healthcare workers over the next two decades.

The largest portion of expense in educating a nurse comes in the first two years required for the associate degree. For this reason, community colleges can easily expand their curriculum to offer the second two years required for the BSN to fulfill the BSN workforce need in our region. A majority of the courses needed for the BSN are actually already offered at WSCC, and we can provide the second half of a student's educational journey with limited institutional costs. Ohio community colleges have strong relationships and already established partnerships with their healthcare partners. We have both the infrastructure established to support this venture and the desire for our workforce to produce more BSN's in the immediate future.





As a rural community in Southeast Ohio, our employers are faced with an additional challenge as our healthcare systems try to recruit BSN graduates back from four-year universities that are more than sixty miles away from our region. Students who leave our region to attend BSN programs in Athens and Columbus complete their clinicals and are highly recruited in those regions. This is understandable because of the desperate need for BSNs across the entire state. Our local healthcare systems would far prefer the opportunity to recruit BSN's who attend classes locally, and are deeply rooted in our region.

Many of our local employers are willing to pay for the costs for one of their nurses to pursue a BSN. However, hospitals in our area feel pressure from numerous fronts to keep their costs low. The average cost to complete a BSN at the nearest four-year institution is \$40,000. At Washington State Community College, that cost would be reduced by more than half. In addition, we have worked with employers on a pathway where new students would be prepared to enter the workforce after the first semester of nursing. This will reduce student debt, provide students with an income while completing their BSNs, and fuel the local healthcare workforce and economy.

At Washington State Community College, we believe that with the continued tremendous support of our healthcare industry partners, we can help support the nursing workforce gap. By listening to the needs of our employers, and Washington State's willingness to be creative in the design of our programs, we are prepared to implement brand new strategies into our area, such as second degree accelerated BSN programs and three-year BSN programs, if permitted to do so through SB 135. We believe this demonstrates to our employers our willingness to think differently and urgently, in order to provide them with new graduates as quickly as we can.

Dr. Wood humbly described Washington State Community College's Associate Degree Program. In fact, our Associate Degree Nursing program (ADN) was ranked as the number one ADN program in Ohio according to RNCareers.org. Moreover, WSCC ranked 44th out of 1,046 schools from across the nation in the RN Careers' annual report. The program's current NCLEX





RN pass rate is 96.96%, which is more than 10% higher than the national average and over 12% above the state average. Based on our programs' phenomenal outcomes, it is evident that we know how to do this work and if finally given the chance, we know we will be able to deliver what our employers are asking us for.

Thank you, Chairman Johnson and members of the committee for the opportunity to testify today and represent the long-standing view of our employers who desperately want Washington State Community College to have the ability to train BSN Nurses for them. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

