



Jean R. Paddock, PhD, President
Testimony on SB 135
Senate Workforce and Education Committee
May 26, 2021

Chairman Johnson, Vice Chair Cirino, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Senate Workforce and Education Committee:

It is my honor and privilege to speak with you today and I thank you for this opportunity. I am Dr. Jean Paddock, President of Aultman College in Stark County and I am passionate about education for our Ohio citizens as I believe it is one of the key building blocks for the health of our workforce and the strength of our communities. Today, I consider it my responsibility as an academic leader in our state to share with you and help you feel equipped as you make decisions that impact campuses like mine. I appreciate how difficult those decisions must be and my goal is to help you feel empowered and informed as you debate key issues in Senate Bill 135, particularly as they relate to nursing education.

My bottom-line takeaway is this:

The provision in SB 135 involving guaranteed approval of bachelor's degree nursing programs at Ohio community colleges not only duplicates existing collaboration and partnerships (already in place at virtually no cost to taxpayers and the state), but also removes safeguards on quality and review, put in place to protect students as they consider where to invest their educational dollars.

Please allow me to further explain these two concerns.

I think it may be helpful for you to understand my campus – our students are not so different from those learning at our local community college, in Stark County.

- Aultman College, is located in Canton. We serve about 350 students who are all studying healthcare on our commuter campus – meaning we have no dorms. These are future radiographers, nurses, social workers, and medical assistants, all taking care of you and I in our hours of greatest need.
- We are majority non-traditional institution, with the average age of our student being 27, with 42 percent of them qualifying as Pell eligible (these are high financial need students). As an aside, our students do use the Ohio College Opportunity Grant (OCOG) program, and we THANK YOU for the funding provided through that.
- While we do serve some full-time, traditional students, it is important to note that more than 50 percent of our students are balancing their part-time studies with us, a part- or full-time job, and for many, parenting and/or elder care responsibilities, as well.

Why do these students choose Aultman College? We offer some unique opportunities:

- We are a health-system affiliated college – the only one in NE Ohio, one of six throughout this state and one of about 30 in the USA. Our key workforce partner, Aultman Health Foundation (the largest employer in Stark County), allows us to provide a unique immersion into the healthcare environment throughout the students' time with us.

- We deliver on workforce and jobs in our communities. This is critical to understand. In our graduate surveys, 100% of our graduates are working in their chosen field within 6 months of earning their degree or certificate. It is additionally of note that approximately 97% join the workforce and take jobs in and around NE Ohio (not just at Aultman) with fewer than 3% leaving our state.

These are rooted Ohioans who are proud to help lead their communities to improved health, working in rural and urban settings. We pride ourselves in getting high-need students into the healthcare workforce and providing a great return on their investment in Aultman College. We are not at full capacity for the number of students we can serve and we would happily accept more students. We are concerned that by allowing community colleges in areas of Ohio that currently offer four-year nursing degrees (and have capacity), you are not expanding the number of nurses, but diluting the schools and partnerships that already provide nursing education.

This brings me to my concern about program duplication in SB 135, particularly focused on bachelor's degrees in nursing. One of the programs we pride ourselves on is completing Associate Degree nurses, typically working in his/her field, with a Bachelor's Completion degree. We do this not only for our own graduates but for any Associate's Degree RN. One of our partners in this effort, is our local community college, Stark State.

- An RN who wishes to complete his/her Bachelor's Degree with us can do so in as few as five semesters, rounding out to an approximate cost of \$12,000 per year. We offer the degree online so the nurse can earn and learn simultaneously.
- If the student happens to be employed with our health system partner (Aultman), through our own tuition discount for our colleagues and with employer tuition reimbursement, that cost drops to less than \$3,500 per year.
- These programs (and others like it – even on other campuses in my Stark County community) *already exist at no cost to the state*. My campus is just one example.
- Our program happens to have been additionally awarded consistent external recognition for value and quality, most recently in Spring 2021 from nursing advocacy website RegisteredNursing.org. We were recognized as first in Ohio for an online program for RNs to earn their bachelor's degree.

Why duplicate when a working program like ours exists? Again, we are just one example. Creative solutions are out there with employer, public, community, and private partnerships already in place. Again, with no dollars provided in term of state funding beyond direct student support through programs like OCOG.

In addition to duplication, I have a key secondary concern.

I would respectfully ask you to consider program quality when you consider where to invest precious state support. In the proposed bill, guaranteed nursing Bachelor's Degree approval circumvents critical program quality review steps, thereby reducing protections for students. Program quality should be a critical consideration, particularly when thinking about the quality of nurses in the workforce! Our campus looks to first-time licensure pass rates (the NCLEX test graduate nurses take to become an RN) as the standard quality measure. For the last 3 years, our pass rates have been 98.44%, 94.37%, and most recently 100% (always exceeding state of Ohio and National averages). Part of the role of the quality review by the Ohio Department of Higher Education (and accreditors and authorizing agencies) is

to protect students and their investment by making sure we offer solid programs. I would want to invest my money into a program that had a great reputation, full of quality outcomes like these.

Lastly, please consider this. Did you know that a nursing faculty is the hardest to recruit faculty member on our campus? And did you know that our ability to offer seats to students depends wholly on the number of clinical sites available to them? They are already difficult to secure, and our campus has a partner! By adding additional programs, particularly duplicate an dwithout a quality review, there is the increased potential downward pressure on existing programs being able to continue to serve existing students and workforce pipelines already in place.

I've given you much to consider. Thank you for listening and learning. If I did my job well, as you debate and decide your position on Senate Bill 135, I hope you feel more educated and informed. I sincerely wish you well in those deliberations. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.