



AFT Connecticut
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Testimony of Melodie Peters, 1st Vice President
AFT Connecticut

SB 929 An Act Concerning the Qualifications of School Nurses

Education Committee
February 23, 2011

Healthcare
Higher Education
Public Employees
PSRP
Teachers

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Good afternoon Senator Stillman and Representative Fleischmann. Today I appear on behalf of the thousands of healthcare workers, including school nurses, represented by AFT Connecticut in opposition to SB 929, An Act Concerning Qualifications of School Nurses.

Sharon Palmer
PRESIDENT

Melodie Peters
1ST VICE PRESIDENT

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SECRETARY/TREASURER

Thomas Bruem
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This same legislation was considered in 2009 after a School Nurse Task Force established by the General Assembly failed to come to consensus on how best to raise the profile and compensation for school nurses. It failed because it makes unrealistic demands on school districts. It is a difficult task to find experienced nurses willing to serve in our schools at the low salaries school districts are willing to pay. By requiring school nurses to have baccalaureate degrees or a number of credit hours beyond an associate's degree AND be certified by the National Board of Certification for School Nurses, SB 929 is essentially asking Boards of Education to pay more for the same service they already have.

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AFT Connecticut certainly appreciates education at all levels, but school nurses currently have the qualifications they need to perform their responsibilities. What school nurses really need is a manageable and safe workload. That is why we have asked this Committee to raise legislation that would require each school building, within reasonable enrollment limits, to have its own school nurse.

Current statute requires that districts only have one registered nurse. It is left to the school district to determine how many nurses it hires and where it places them. Currently, in many urban and poor districts, there may be one school nurse to cover two or three schools. This leaves entire student bodies, for significant periods of

time during a school week, without an onsite nurse. That is just not safe and asks too much of school nurses.

We do support the professional development provisions in SB 929, but we would take that one step further. In the legislation we asked this committee to raise, we suggested creating a School Nurse Professional Development Advisory Council, much like we have for paraprofessionals. This would ensure that school nurses get professional development that is actually relevant and recognizes the diverse nature of their responsibilities. They currently don't have the formal ability to help identify professional development that is beneficial to performance of their jobs.

We are all concerned about our state's achievement gap, whose roots are largely found in the socioeconomic differences between our most wealthy and our most vulnerable. AFT Connecticut strongly believes that it takes an entire school of committed professionals and parents to close the gap, but school nurses play an especially important part. Sometimes they are the only healthcare professional a child may see and they can help identify problems before they derail a child's learning. School nurses can help match families with needed services and they are advocates for students in a way that is different from teachers or administrators. They are a vital part of not just student health, but a school's health.

If we are going to consider asking Boards of Education, in this difficult economic time, to spend more money on school nurses, such an investment is better directed at making sure each school has its own nurse, before endeavoring to raise qualification requirements.

The language detailing our proposals is attached to my testimony. I hope you will strongly consider our suggestions. Thank you



AFT Connecticut
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AAC A School Nurse in Every School Building

Chapter 169a School Health and Sanitation

Sec. 10-212. School nurses and nurse practitioners. Administration of medications by parents or guardians on school grounds. Criminal history records checks. (a) Each local or regional board of education shall appoint ~~one or more~~ at least one school nurses or nurse practitioners in each school building. Such school nurses and nurse practitioners appointed by such boards shall be qualified pursuant to regulations adopted in accordance with the provisions of chapter 54 by the State Board of Education in consultation with the Department of Public Health. Such school nurses may also act as visiting nurses in the town, may visit the homes of pupils in the public schools and shall assist in executing the orders of the school medical advisor, if there is any in such town, and perform such other duties as are required by such board.

Sec. 10-212-5. Continuing qualification as school nurse

(a) A school nurse qualified pursuant to Sections 10-212-2 or 10-212-3 shall continue to be so qualified, provided that such nurse participates in at least ten hours of professional development programs or activities approved by the local or regional board of education in each two-year period commencing on the effective date of these regulations.

(b) There is established a School Nurse Professional Development Advisory Council consisting of one representative from each state-wide bargaining organization that represents school nurses; one representative from the Association of School Nurses of Connecticut and one representative from the Connecticut Nurses Association. The council shall advise, at least quarterly, the Commissioner of Education, or the Commissioner's designee, of the needs for the training of such school nurses and the effectiveness of the content and the delivery of existing training for school nurses.

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