

3/21/11

Dear Sir/Madame,

I am writing to you regarding bill #1178, the care and treatment of students with diabetes while at school. I am a Registered Nurse with a Baccalaureate degree in nursing working in Hartford Public Schools. I am currently enrolled in a Master's program at the University of Hartford. I have fifteen years of pediatric experience, ten of which have been in the school setting.

The thought of a "school designated aide" administering insulin or monitoring a child with diabetes at school is not only unsafe, but potentially life threatening. How do you train someone on diabetic procedures and management of diabetes that took me four years of schooling to learn? Who is responsible for their training? Will they be trained to identify complications? How about knowing the difference between hypoglycemia and hyperglycemia? How to respond to this? Whose license are they working under? I would not want this person working under my license. There is too much room for error. I'm not willing to risk a child's health, well being, and potential life, are you? Has anyone asked the parents of these children if they are comfortable putting their child's medical care into the hands of a "school designated aide"?

More medically fragile children are being mainstreamed into public schools every year. The focus of healthcare in children is changing from acute care to chronic care. A professional school nurse is needed for the assessment, planning, implementing, and evaluation of children's medical needs, so their educational needs can be met. This can only be accomplished through a registered nurse. One of the many challenges a school nurse faces are the multiple healthcare providers involved in children's medical treatment plans. The doctor's orders and equipment for the same condition may be different, requiring the school nurse to be familiar with multiple technologies and protocols. "The technical level of school nurses has increased to those needed by nurses providing hospital care" (Percy, 2006). These technology dependent children would not be able to function in a school setting without nursing support. When looking at these children, they often have other medical issues going that an "aide" will not be trained to identify. As nurses, we are trained to follow the nursing process and can often quickly identify and rectify a problem or complication. This will not be the case for anyone else. This problem or complication if gone unnoticed could potentially put a child at an unnecessary risk. Are the legislators who are proposing this willing to back it up when an incident occurs? Would they want their medically fragile child in the care of a "school designated aide"?

School nurses are not just checking blood sugars and administering insulin. We are assessing the whole child. We are in constant communication with the endocrinologist and adjusting children's diabetic plan based on their needs. Uncontrolled blood sugars can result in complications later on in life. Training someone to identify only specific signs and symptoms is not as simple as you think. Symptoms for one child may be different for another. It's taking the symptoms presented to you and assessing the whole child at that moment to make a nursing judgment. Ask any health professional and they will agree, this takes critical thinking skills to develop an analysis and plan of action. Nurses can also take direct orders from physicians, "aides" cannot. A child's well being may be in jeopardy while an "aide" or other school personnel try to reach a parent. Diabetes in children can be very unpredictable and

each child responds differently. Insulin could potentially harm a child if given incorrectly. Who's going to educate the child, parent, and teacher? Diabetes is a lifelong disease. Ongoing education is imperative for management and prevention of complications. School nurses are often the person a parent seeks out when having problems with the diabetic plan. The skills needed to monitor diabetic children require those of a nurse.

I'd like to give you a real example of why a professional school nurse is needed.

Steven (whose name has been changed for confidentiality reasons) is a child in 2nd grade with diabetes. His mom has intellectual limitations, limited financial resources, three other children, and often comes to the school nurse for reinforcement of instructions. Due to her financial limitations she has difficulty shopping for "healthy" foods. She also has trouble counting carbs to determine the insulin dose. Her health insurance plan only allowed a homecare nurse for a short period. The school nurse reinforces diabetic teaching with mom. Steven's blood sugars are not well controlled; they fluctuate during the school day. Often times he checks his blood sugar and gets a normal reading and suddenly will "bottom out" a short time later. The school nurse picked up on this and has to adjust his school plan to meet his diabetic needs while keeping him in school. Steven's school emergency plan is continually adjusted to meet his and the teacher's needs. His teacher is comforted in knowing the school nurse is a phone call and few steps away. Without a school nurse, Steven would most likely be sent home each time he became symptomatic because it took close monitoring to get him stabilized. This close monitoring by the school nurse has allowed Steven to remain in school. The steps the school nurse has taken with Steven are a nursing function that cannot be "taught". The school nurse has administered his glucagon on a few occasions and immediately followed up with the physician. Glucagon can be a life saving medication for diabetics. Will a trained "aide" be able to administer glucagon? Assess the effectiveness? Will they be able to handle any adverse reactions? These are important questions that should be addressed. The teaching and support the school nurse provides to Steven and his mom keeps them out of the emergency room during the school year. Whereas, on school vacations and during the summer, Steven is brought to the emergency room more often because mom does not have a direct contact for support. This clearly delineates the significant role the school nurse has on education and maintenance on health.

With the focus and pressure on achieving state standard test scores, educators should not and for the most part do not want the responsibility of providing medical care to students. Their attention is needed in the classrooms to educate children. Having a professional nurse in school to not only manage children's medical needs, but assist in keeping children healthy and in school is part of our role. We have an impact on attendance by talking with families about absenteeism, working with primary care providers, and identifying whether or not a child should be in school. How are test scores going to continue to improve if children are not in school? In the absence of the school nurse, school personnel often send children home because they do not have the expertise to assess a child's health.

The idea of a "school designated aide" may seem necessary, but the potential ramifications are not in the best interest of children's health and well being. Educators should continue educating and leave the maintenance of health and meeting children's medical needs to the health professional. A child's education and health can be dramatically impacted without having a professional nurse in school.

If this bill passes, it will not only affect children, but their families as well. Parents bring their children to school and count on the school nurse to keep them healthy and safe. By not having a school nurse present to perform the necessary medical care, parents will be constantly contacted for guidance or to pick up their child. This will greatly impact our working parents and may cost them their job.

Please vote no, it is in the best interest of children. Their health and education are a necessity for them to grow up and lead productive lives. You can make a difference in a child's life with your vote. What if it was your child? What would be in their best interest?

Sincerely,

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