



Testimony of
Verna Bernard-Jones, RN MS NCSN, President
Hartford Federation of Teachers Health Professionals
AFT Local 1018 A/B

HB 5348 Act Concerning School Nurses and School Medical Advisors.

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. I am Verna Bernard-Jones and I am a school nurse at West Middle School in Hartford. I'm also President of the Hartford Federation of Teachers Health Professionals, a local union representing 65 school nurses and health professionals employed in the Hartford school district. I am here today to testify in support of HB 5348, legislation that would require safe school nurse staffing levels and provide much needed professional development for school nurses.

School nursing is a specialized practice of professional nursing that advances the well-being, academic success, and life-long achievement of students. To that end, school nurses facilitate positive student responses to normal development; promote health and safety; intervene with actual and potential health problems; provide case management services; and actively collaborate with others to build student and family capacity for adaptation, self-management, self-advocacy, and learning.

While everyone recognizes schools as education centers and sites for extracurricular activities, there is far less awareness that the vast majority of schools are also healthcare settings. Almost one-third (30%) of children have chronic health issues including diabetes, asthma and hypertension. According to the Centers for Disease Control, one-third of school-aged children are obese or overweight; 13% require prescription medication use lasting more than three months; and slightly fewer than 10% have asthma.

Every school day, children present myriad health needs that school nurses and other school personnel must meet. Among those needs are acute emergencies like seizures, low blood sugar and asthma attacks; emotional and psychological turmoil; required mandatory and periodic screenings; as well the administration and monitoring of medication and procedures such as tube feeding. School nurses also provide students and faculty with strategies to promote good health and up-to-date information on infectious and contagious diseases. Ultimately, the school nurse manages the assessment, planning, intervention and evaluation of health services for students.

Just last week I was finally taking a quick lunch break at almost 2pm when the secretary came running in saying a student was having some type of allergic reaction. He was covered in hives and he had no documented history of allergies. Without a nurse in the school to assess his condition, administer medication, and monitor him for anaphylaxis, the outcome could have been very different. You might remember the case earlier this year where a child in Virginia died in school from an allergic reaction. Although that child had a known peanut allergy there was no nurse in that school to administer lifesaving medication and treatment.

My colleagues and I believe that every child deserves a school nurse. Sadly, current practice does not insure that is the case. Attached to my testimony is a resolution that AFT, our national union, passed in 2002 adapting the guidelines of the National Association of School Nurse about the need for minimum staffing levels to keep students safe and healthy.

Whether in a free-standing school-based health clinic or in the school itself, school nurses work with students, paraprofessionals, teachers, other healthcare providers and parents to ensure that children are healthy so they can make the most of their opportunity to learn. We ask for your support of this important bill. Thank you.

AFT 2002 RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, We believe that every student need a professional registered nurse certified by the appropriate state agency provides unique and valuable services to students, parents and school personnel; and

WHEREAS, through public schools, the school nurse and the school communities can work together in unprecedented ways to eliminate barriers to learning and to provide access to healthcare for children and families;

WHEREAS, the country's School nurses are pivotal members of a coordinated school health system, delivering services to children and, thereby, eliminating health disparities and barriers and supporting academic success for all children; and

WHEREAS, School nurses provide vital links between public and private resources and programs, collaboration between schools and health and human service agencies to bring school and community services to schools, and support efforts to connect families to insurance programs to meet the needs of children and families; and

WHEREAS, School nurses create and maintain safe school environments; provide health education, mandatory health screenings and immunizations; deliver early intervention services; design wellness-driven programs; and provide vital medical services to students with chronic and acute illnesses; and

WHEREAS, these essential services require specially educated and experienced professional personnel:

RESOLVED, in addition to having at least one full-time school nurse in every school, AFT supports the ratio of students for each professional certified registered nurse to be 1:750 or fraction thereof for regular students, 1:225 or fraction thereof for mainstreamed students, or 1:125 or fraction thereof for severely/profoundly handicapped students.