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Public Health Committee

Public Health Committee
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Greetings Senator Gerratana and Representative Johnson and members of the Public Health Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of:

RB 1070: AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL NURSE STAFFING AND ESTABLISHMENT OF A SCHOOL NURSE ADVISORY COUNCIL.

As the President-Elect of the Association of School Nurses of CT (ASNC) and the Health Coordinator of the ACES RESC/school district, I am fully supportive of the stated purpose of RB 1070, and would like to address each of the 2 sections.

Section 1. The proposed addition to the subsection (a) of section 10-212 The local or regional board of education shall maintain a staffing ratio of school nurses to students that is appropriate to the size and health needs of the student population in order to promote a healthy learning environment, provides some long anticipated and welcomed structure to promoting adequate school nurse coverage in CT schools. The current requirement of “one or more school nurses” that has been in effect since 1982 has resulted in significant disparities in school nurse resources for students in CT. For example, Hamden has 16 school nurses for 14 schools with a an average school nurse to student ratio of 1:409; whereas the neighboring city of New Haven has 30 nurses to cover 53 school sites with an average school nurse to student ratio of 1:770. Governor Malloy’s December 20, 2011 education letter to the CT General Assembly noted “Connecticut’s poor and minority students are less prepared for success than their peers in the vast majority of other states – and that our state has the largest achievement gap in the nation.” Just as education reform is a step toward addressing this achievement gap, this proposed legislation is a step toward addressing our state’s health care gap. For many of Connecticut’s economically disadvantaged and minority children and adolescents a school nurse may be their most accessible source of healthcare, addressing immediate needs, while advocating and coordinating with community medical providers. Qualified school nurses are capable of addressing

student health issues that positively impact the time students spend in class, ready to learn – a foundational component to improving any achievement gap. One of our principals put this in perspective, stating “when I was a principal at my other school that did not have a nurse on site, and a student came to me with a health problem, my two most common options were to call 911 or send them home – I was not qualified to assess if it was safe for them to return to class.”

I do respectfully request that the wording the in this proposed addition end in “.....in order to promote academic achievement”, since the focus of school nursing is on the individual student and health promotion, rather than the “learning environment”.

Section 2. The establishment of a school nurse advisory council would provide structure to addressing school health and nursing related issues that have been very resource intensive for legislators, school nurses, and educators. Most legislative sessions include proposed bills that address complex physical and mental health issues such as asthma, diabetes, epilepsy, life-threatening food allergies, depression, and violence, often in the context of individual students. This proposed school nurse advisory council could facilitate a shift toward addressing these, and other related school health issues, in the context of the best approach for all of Connecticut’s students and schools. The result would be a more effective and efficient approach to addressing the legal, medical, and educational implications of proposed school health related legislation. As most districts struggle with budget issues, this council could help identify what aspects of the school nurse role are essential in an educational setting, making the best use of this resource to support academic achievement. Ideally, this council could also improve how school nurses coordinate care with primary care and specialty providers, supporting Connecticut’s commitment to the Person-Centered Medical Home (PCMH) model. Improved health care access and coordination would make an invaluable contribution toward improving the academic achievement gap. I fully support this proposed legislation that is a fundamental step toward achieving these goals.