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Co-chairs Senator Gerratana and Representative Johnson, Members of the Public Health Committee,
Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of:

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

School nurses serve as a link between the school, the home, the health care provider, and the community. Children who enter the school system are as young as 3 or as old as 21; typical children and children with special needs. The school nurse is there for all children. Children with physical, emotional, and social needs are in schools throughout Connecticut. Just like an educator with a specialty in math or science, reading, history, or foreign language, the school nurse specializes in school health.

The school nurse plays a crucial role in the management and provision of comprehensive health services for children with acute and chronic conditions. The role of the school nurse is to serve as a team member in providing preventive services, early identification of problems, interventions, and referrals to foster health, to ensure educational success for all children.

After the child's home, school represents the second most influential environment in a child's life. The school nurse is the only health care professional in school, and for some children, their only access to health care. Students today may face family crises, homelessness, immigration, poverty, and violence, which increase both their physical and mental health needs. School nurses perform a critical role within the school by addressing the major health problems experienced by children.

School nurses are key in "No Child Left Behind" which recognizes that "a student's academic performance is directly linked to the quality of the school staff." The State Department of Education Connecticut School Health Survey indicates that 90% of students seen by a school nurse return to class within 30 minutes. The school nurse directly influences academic achievement and help to decrease school dropout rates by keeping kids in school, in class, and ready to learn. "Today, school nurses recognize their most valuable impact occurs in roles that support student's educational success" (**School Nursing, A Comprehensive Text**). According to the CDC, "the academic success of

America's youth is strongly linked with their health. Despite these linkages, education and health are treated as separate."

Perhaps the best way to speak to the issue is to share my personal experience as a school nurse. When I left a hospital emergency room to become a school nurse, my nursing colleagues said "You will be bored." They could not have been more wrong. In the ER, I had medical colleagues, doctors, nurses, hospital staff, to help when things went wrong. In school, I was alone. I remember the middle school student who presented in my health room with acute asthma. I did not know he had asthma because he never told anyone nor did his family. My nursing assessment told me this kid is in trouble. This child was transported from my office via ambulance to ICU for where he remained for three days. On another occasion a 12 year old boy who had a grand mal seizure for the first time in school. We effectively cared for this child who had been exposed to drug use in utero. I recognized the connection because I participate in continuing education, an essential process when involved in school nursing. On another occasion I cared for a child in kindergarten with a genetic syndrome that affected all her body systems. She had been in a school for disabled children and had never been able to attend a regular school with non-disabled classmates. Because I am a qualified school nurse supervisor and I had an equally qualified school nurse to provide her care, this child was included in a regular kindergarten classroom. She thrived and captured the hearts of everyone-teachers, therapists, classmates, and the bus driver.

It is understood that school nurses provide health care in school. What is less understood is that they need not only be a competent health care provider, they must understand the educational environment. Providing health care in a school is vastly different from providing care in a medical facility. Children do not come to school with monitors, x-rays, lab tests. At times, school nurse have to be detectives. The most they might get from a young child is "I don't feel good." The school nurse must use assessment, experience, knowledge, and even their gut to figure out what the issue is.

School nurses, unlike other nurses, must also understand education, the classroom and such things as IEP's, 504 plans, SRBI. School nurses must understand how to provide health care in a school with the least impact on educational time. They need to understand the "other side of the health room door" and how to translate health information into educational language so educators will make the connection between health and academic achievement.

Since 1982, there has been no change in qualifications for school nurses, despite the tremendous changes in medicine, technology, and today's students.

Senator Gerratana, I know you were instrumental in passing children's health care legislation as well as managed care and mental health reform. Your commitment to social change and the betterment of people in your District and across the state of Connecticut has been recognized by many.

Representative Johnson, you advocate for Medicare beneficiaries. You received a perfect rating from the Environmental Group for your efforts. You are a one of 3 legislators who proposed:

AN ACT CONCERNING MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING AND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS.

All of this is what school nurses do.

In conclusion, the impact of qualified school nurses on health and educational outcomes is well evidenced in the literature and is evident for me personally as I interact with school nurse colleagues all over Connecticut.

In 1998, the State Department of Education recommended changes to the statute and regulatory changes for school nurses. In 1999 I met for the first time with legislators from Education and Public Health and other stakeholders on this same issue. There is nothing else I can say today that I have not said many times over the past. If I cannot convince you to convene a School Nurse Advisory Council now, I never will. Please do not let 14 years go by again before a School Nurse Advisory Council becomes a reality. School nurses all over Connecticut are waiting for your decision. Thank you.