

March 19, 2013

Dear Public Health Committee Chairs and Members:

I am submitting written testimony today regarding SB 1070 *AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL NURSE STAFFING AND ESTABLISHMENT OF A SCHOOL NURSE ADVISORY COUNCIL*. As a registered nurse, former school nurse and now a professor of nursing, I urge you to **fully support** this proposed bill. This bill will help ensure that the health needs of all children in schools are addressed through safe staffing levels. In addition, the establishment of a school nurse advisory council is an effective way to identify ongoing strengths and challenges regarding school nursing services and provide a venue to make future recommendations to the state agencies, local school districts and the legislative body of Connecticut.

I have submitted written testimony in the past urging you to reject certain bills, such as HB 5299 and asking you to consider holding school districts accountable for safe staffing levels for schools. The proposed language: "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", is an effective way to allow school districts to have autonomy regarding what those levels are based on student needs and at the same time raise the current statute from one nurse per district to safe staffing levels. **This will go a long way in ensuring that the students in Connecticut schools have access to school nurses when needed.**

Over the years, there have been many bills and recommendations to the legislature regarding school nurse regulations, medication administration in schools, chronic illnesses and the care of students with chronic illnesses, etc.; while all were well intended, many of these bills have resulted in fragmented or isolated approaches to health care in schools or even more frustrating, no movement at all such as in the case of increasing the qualifications for school nurses. The establishment of a school nurse advisory council to make recommendations and provide a written report to school districts regarding but not limited to (1) Professional development for school nurses; (2) school nurse staffing levels; and (3) the delivery of health care services by school nurses in schools will assist in developing consistency across all school districts and ensure quality health services. **In the end, the establishment of an advisory council will have a significant impact on the children in this state by ensuring their health needs met by highly qualified school nurses.**

In addition to serving children with chronic health care needs, school nurses also address the mental health needs of students. Ensuring that school districts have proper nursing services and establishing an advisory council will also help address the growing mental health concerns that face our children. Did you know that there are approximately 1200 school nurses in our state covering approximately 1500 schools with each district establishing their own policies and procedures? Establishing recommendations to guide practice based on national and state standards, ensuring safe staffing levels, and communicating this information to school administrators, state agencies, and the legislator will help Connecticut develop the highest level of service for students across each community.

I would like to recommend some friendly edits to the proposed bill:

1. Expand the membership to include a school medical advisor from the Connecticut Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics; a parent recommended by the advisory board; and 2 community members with expertise in school health recommended by the advisory board.

2. Require the report to be sent to school districts by the Commissioners of Education and Public Health jointly.

**I urge you to support this bill with the friendly amendments above.** School nurses are the primary safety net for the health needs of students. You can make the difference in the lives of students by supporting this bill. I have included my contact information below and would be happy to work with you to provide substitute language as needed.

Sincerely,



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