

TESTIMONY FOR THE HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Opposition to House Bills 5556 and 5557
Tuesday, November 30, 2021

Good morning. My name is Judith McKenna, DNP, and I am the Dean of the College of Nursing and Health at Madonna University located in Livonia, Michigan. I also serve as the President of the Michigan Association of Colleges of Nursing (MACN), which is an organization that represents 28 of the state's four-year public and private nursing programs.

I would like to begin by thanking Chair Hornberger and members of the House Education committee for allowing me the opportunity to testify and express our concerns related to House Bills 5556 and 5557.

I have over 30 years of experience as a registered nurse, nurse practitioner, nursing instructor, and professor. I was the founding director for the nursing program at Alma College, which involved writing the self-study and nursing curriculum, obtaining state approval, and then national professional nursing accreditation. All of this before coming to Madonna University to lead our programs.

There are a number of routes to entry to practice as a Registered Nurse. In our four-year colleges, the most common route to entry is the Baccalaureate degree in Nursing, the BSN. The baccalaureate degree in nursing is discipline specific and includes a minimum of 120 credits. It is important to understand the rigor of this degree that prepares graduates to take the National Council Licensure Exam, in order to be a Registered Nurse. Typically, BSN programs require between 35-40 credits of science courses including biology, microbiology, chemistry (organic, inorganic, and biochemistry), nutrition, genetics, anatomy and physiology. The degree includes courses in math, psychology, communication, statistics, evidence-based practice, ethics and cultural awareness. Nursing-specific courses include health assessment; pathophysiology, and pharmacology. Our programs include both classroom and clinical (patient care) experiences in community and public health, adult health, pediatric, psych/mental health, obstetrics and family nursing and leadership. The direct clinical experiences average 1,200 hours over the course of 4 years.

Another route to become a registered nurse (RN) is through a 2-year associate's degree in nursing (ADN). The students in these programs also prepare to take the RN licensing exam, but their program does not have the additional two years of academic rigor of the 4-year BSN program. Because of this, many institutions have a BSN completion program which allows a 2-year ADN-educated RN to complete their BSN while they are already working. A 2-year ADN program is the fastest way for a student to become a registered nurse and start working in the healthcare system. Both an ADN and BSN result in a student being prepared to take the licensing exam to become a registered nurse.

The state of Michigan is home to nearly 165,000 licensed registered nurses, which is an increase of nearly 9,500 licensed nurses since 2019, prior to the pandemic. Michigan also has more

licensed RNs than the national average. During the 2020-2021 academic year, Michigan's four-year BSN undergraduate nursing programs had over 9,000 nursing students enrolled in our programs with nearly 3,500 nursing graduates last year in 2020. While we understand there are significant workforce issues in healthcare, this is not due to the pipeline of nursing students. This bill would increase current workforce issues by allowing community colleges to close their existing 2-year nursing programs and create 4-year programs that will take additional years to train students, even though there are ample opportunities for students at existing programs.

There is no lack of nursing programs in this state, 68 pre-licensure nursing programs already exist, and evidence shows there is no educational gap in nursing education. We continue to do our part educating highly trained nurses for the workforce and have capacity for additional students for both traditional BSN programs as well as RN to BSN completion programs. In fact, there were over 1,200 unfilled nursing seats in 4-year programs throughout the state for fall 2021. There are no waiting lists.

While it is desirable for Michigan to have more baccalaureate-trained nurses, allowing community colleges to offer bachelor degrees in nursing will not increase the numbers of nurses in our state. RN to BSN completion programs do not train new nurses. . If community colleges take the same number of students into their programs, and matriculate over 4 years, rather than two years, that will not increase the number of nurses in Michigan. Instead, it will simply take longer for nursing students at community colleges to enter the field and begin working. This will have a direct impact on the nursing and delay entry into the nursing profession for many.

I will now turn to the issue of nursing faculty. Hiring qualified nursing faculty is a major issue and would be exacerbated by the passage of these bills. Nursing faculty teaching baccalaureate-level students MUST have an advanced degree, a master's or doctoral degree. Nursing programs across Michigan can request faculty exemptions for certain professors if they are unable to find a qualified instructor with an advanced degree. Community colleges by and large request more faculty exemptions than 4-year institutions. If community colleges start BSN programs, are they magically going to be able to find faculty with advanced degrees that the 4-year colleges and universities have not been able to hire? I think not. Instead, they will continue to request faculty exemptions at a high rate or attempt to hire faculty from existing 4-year programs. This is a particular problem in rural areas where workers with a master's or doctoral degree are few and far between.

If community colleges are able to put together competitive compensation packages to attract faculty with advanced degrees, won't this increase costs for students and taxpayers for programs that are already the most expensive to offer at a community college?

I don't want to only focus on the problems passage of the bill would create or heighten. I'd also like to share why this legislation is unnecessary in the first place. Employers in Michigan, especially hospitals, want nurses with bachelor's degrees. We understand this well. 4-year institutions in Michigan award over 3,500 bachelor's degrees in nursing annually. Many of these degrees are earned through BSN-completion programs for associate degree-level RNs to

complete a bachelor's degree while they are working. Some of these are also for transfer students into BSN programs from community colleges.

These programs and partnerships allow RNs with an associate's degree to complete their BSN. We have 19 such programs in Michigan, 18 of which are offered fully online. Many students prefer this due to increased flexibility since they are also working while they earn their next degree. I'd like to be clear; these programs do not create new nurses. They allow an RN increase their degree level either because their employer demands it OR they want to obtain an advanced degree and a BSN is an essential stepping stone on that pathway. The important thing here is that these programs are widely available, flexible, and the best option for working RNs.

What has higher education done to help the more traditional student from a community college? Transfer partnerships. We specialize in articulation agreements across many fields of study and nursing is one of them. My institution, Madonna University, has a 3+1 partnership with Schoolcraft College. This means that students can attend the Schoolcraft nursing program for 3 years then transfer seamlessly to Madonna to complete their final year of education and clinical training for a BSN. For students in our local area this has been a successful partnership and many programs that are most often 2 years at a community college and 2 years at a higher education institution, have been successful across the state.

Eighteen 4-year public and private, non-profit colleges and universities have transfer agreements with community colleges in the state. Many institutions accept transfer students from every community college in Michigan even if there is not an explicit transfer agreement. These agreements make transferring from a community college to a 4-year college or university seamless and simple for the student. All of the credits within the agreement transfer, are accepted as part of degree progression, and the student picks up where they left to continue their baccalaureate-level education.

There is ample capacity in the system and clear demand for transfer programs. Cornerstone University, the newest BSN program in our sector, began its first cohort this fall with 16 students, 4 of whom are transfers from community colleges. We know there is demand for BSN-level education and there is space across the state for more students to enroll, either as freshman or as transfers. 16 traditional BSN programs in Michigan are under enrolled and can take more students and as I noted prior, 4-year programs had 1,200 unfilled seats in nursing. Why do we need to create new programs?

In closing, Michigan's public and private undergraduate nursing programs have an excellent and long history of collaboration with our community colleges and we remain committed to increasing opportunities for partnership to meet the nursing demands of this state.

I want to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today. The Michigan Association of Colleges of Nursing Deans and Directors believe that Michigan's existing infrastructure and our nationally accredited four-year nursing programs are the most sensible and cost-effective way to continue to add to the number of bachelor prepared nurses in the workforce. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

