



School Health Services Program Hearing

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA NURSES ASSOCIATION

TESTIMONY, October 25, 2016

My name is Walakewon Blegay and I am the staff attorney for the District of Columbia Nurses Association (DCNA), an affiliate of the National Nurses United, AFL-CIO. DCNA is a full-service professional organization and labor union solely dedicated to representing health care professionals in the District of Columbia. With approximately 2,000 members, DCNA advances the health care profession by fostering high standards of practice, promoting the economic and general welfare of employees in the workplace and lobbying District officials regarding health care issues. DCNA represents approximately over 100 school nurses in DCPS.

Recently, the Department of Health (DOH) announced the change in the School Health Services Program which included dividing the program into 4 components with a grant up to \$19.2 million. Of the four components, only two of the components include direct nursing care: Care Coordination and Clinical and Allied Health Services. In the past, Children's School Service has been awarded \$19 million to run the entire school nursing program. Now they will have to share the award of \$19.2 with another entity that will focus on the other two components: Community Navigation and Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement and Program Evaluation. With the cut in funding for the nursing program, the only alternative would be to decrease the hours of the nurses in schools. Currently, most schools have full-time 40 hour nursing coverage. Any cuts to the school nursing program will have a detrimental impact on the children and would only serve as a disadvantage to DCPS.

Why is the District considering limiting the role of a nurse in 2017? In 2014, DCPS saw its highest enrollment in the last five years. In light of the increase, DCPS announced that it hired 300 new teachers, 24 new librarians, 29

new guidance counselors, 13 new social workers, and six new coaches to work with teachers to support students with disabilities. This trend should include nurses.

A school nurse's role in the school is invaluable. The school nurse is the first line of defense for the health of children. School nurses monitor asthma, diabetes and many more chronic diseases. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, 15-18% of American students have chronic health conditions. Studies provided by the National Association of School Nurses have proven that school nurses improve the school system by decreasing chronic absenteeism, improving outcomes for students with chronic health conditions, immunization compliance and retention rates for students with mental health conditions. I have attached the testimony of a parent, Ayoko Sako, who is a mother of a DCPS kindergartener who suffers from chronic nosebleeds and she explains the helpful guidance from the school nurse, Nurse Rose, who has saved her child on many occasions.

We started a petition on Moveon.org that calls on you to increase the required coverage of nursing services in each school to 40 hours. I have attached the petition signatures of over 1000 individuals, some who are in this room today. As you will see in the petition, many of the comments are from parents who have students in the school system who suffer from asthma, allergies, diabetes and other chronic illnesses. Many of the comments also express outrage of the idea of teachers and other paraprofessionals providing medical care to the students.

It is time to update the law to reflect the comprehensive role of a nurse in the school system today. The District of Columbia Public School Nurse Assignment Act of 1987, § 38-621, requires a minimum of 20 hours of nursing services in the District of Columbia elementary and secondary public and public charter schools. This law was enacted to remedy the severe shortage of nurses in the District's public schools. In 1990, the Council amended the Act to stress the need for mandatory funding. It added the section, "[s]ufficient funds to carry out the requirements of this section *shall be appropriated* out of the general revenues of the District." In 1989, parents brought a suit against the District to ensure that the District provided enough funding for proper nursing coverage under the Act. *Kelly v. Parents United*, 641 A.2d 159 (D.C.), *modified on other grounds*, 648 A.2d 675 (D.C.1994). According to the Department of Health, the Committee on Health requested that the program transition to a minimum of 40 hours of nursing coverage per week at every school.

In the spirit of the law, we need to move forward towards progress. It is time to update the law to require at least 40 hours of nursing coverage in every school. In Philadelphia, a 7-year old child died during school at the time that a nurse was not on duty. The nurse stationed at the child's school was only part-time and this incident occurred on the day that the nurse was not scheduled to

work. Philadelphia made a budgetary decision to cut the funding of school nurses and the price was a child's life. Weeks after the child's death, the Governor of Pennsylvania released \$45 million to the school system.

Chairman Grosso and committee members, we ask that you sponsor legislation that will amend the Public School Nurse Assignment Act to increase the required nursing coverage to 40 hours per week at every school. We cannot afford to make the same mistake that Philadelphia made. The school nurse is the first line of defense for the health care of the child and every child deserves a nurse in their respective schools for 40 hours. Thank you

Respectfully submitted,

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DCNA