



Thank you, Chairman Wiggam, Ranking Member Kelly, and members of the House State and Local Government Committee, for allowing me to testify on behalf of Ohio's independent, nonprofit colleges and universities and their students. My name is C. Todd Jones and I am president and general counsel of the Association of Independent Colleges and Universities of Ohio.

AICUO represents 51 nonprofit institutions of higher education in our state. Our members educate nearly 131,000 students, and award about one third of the baccalaureate degrees in Ohio each year, and an even higher share of our state's degrees in mathematics, natural and biological sciences, and other key areas of study. In the most recent data available, Ohio has 32 independent institutions providing nursing degrees ranging from associate to doctorate level which accounted for over 3,200 students. AICUO institutions also produced almost 1,200 education bachelor's degrees from 38 different institutions.

I am testifying as today as a proponent of House Bill 673, which codifies into law some pandemic-related practices around health care and the teaching professions. In March, when colleges and universities moved to online learning, many nursing students found themselves unable to fulfill the clinical hours needed for a nursing license. Luckily, when the legislature passed House Bill 197, it created a new pandemic nursing license and gave institutions the flexibility to allow seniors to graduate and start working in their fields. We were happy to see that House Bill 673 will ensure those practices are written into law for the likely length of the pandemic and not subject to bureaucratic changes.

First, extending pandemic nursing license rules to July 1, 2021, assures current students that no matter what happens in the fall, they will have the ability to continue with their education and workforce plans. I think this body would agree it is better to think ahead and plan for future possibilities than be forced to pass another retroactive bill after a period of uncertainty.

Codifying language that working hours are also clinical hours may seem unnecessary, but it is another stopgap measure that will ensure that each current nursing student will be able to complete his or her degree if hospitals have to stop offering clinical hours again due to COVID-19. The same is true for the language regarding teacher education programs – I do not think anyone can say with certainty what the fall will look like for K-12 education, but this bill will help ensure a smooth transition for teacher education students no matter what the scenario will be.

Finally, we support the idea of the RFP created in HB 673 to help expand the healthcare workforce. This is desperately needed in Ohio, but without money attached to the new program, I am not sure how effective it will be. In the last budget, this body dedicated money towards incentivizing teachers' credentials to fill the College Credit Plus dual-enrollment certification, and I think modeling that funding model would be a worthwhile investment.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.