

Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 68
Senate Health Policy Committee, March 10, 2015

Good morning Chairman Shirkey and members of the Senate Health Policy Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill 68. My name is Cynthia McCurren, and I am the Dean of the Kirkhof College of Nursing at Grand Valley State University, and the current President of the Michigan Association of Colleges of Nursing- an organization that represents 21 Michigan schools of nursing that educate students at the baccalaureate and graduate level. Michigan's nursing schools graduate an average of 475 Advanced Practice Registered Nurses per year. There are approximately 1500 students currently studying in Michigan's graduate nursing programs to become Advanced Practice Registered Nurses. Joining me today is Dr. Ramona Benkert, Interim Associate Dean for Academic and Clinical Affairs from Wayne State University College of Nursing.

Our comments today will be directed towards the education and training of Advanced Practice Registered Nurses. The definitions in Senate Bill 68 are based on the National Council of State Boards of Nursing Consensus Model for APRN regulation, national professional nursing standards of APRN practice, and educational preparation. Hence, SB 68 would enable Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) to practice to the fullest extent of their advanced graduate education, national certification and competencies.

As educators of APRNs, we take pride in the level of rigor of our educational programs. Nursing education at the undergraduate and graduate levels is held to the highest degree of scrutiny, requiring national professional accreditation for each nursing degree program.

Individuals who are seeking to become an advanced practice registered nurse must have first earned a 4-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree, completed through a nationally accredited nursing program. The baccalaureate degree in nursing is discipline specific and must include 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 (NCLEX), in order to be a Registered Nurse

(RN). It typically requires 35-40 credits of science based courses to include biology, microbiology, chemistry (organic, inorganic, and biochemistry), genetics, anatomy and physiology, nutrition, pathophysiology, and pharmacology. The degree is complemented by courses in math, psychology, communication, statistics, evidence-based practice, ethics and cultural awareness. Nursing specific sequenced course credits include health assessment; primary care, community and public health, adult, pediatric, psych/mental health, obstetrics and family nursing and leadership. The direct clinical experiences average 1200 clock hours.

Registered Nurses (RNs) who want to become an Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRNs), must have earned the Bachelor of Science (BSN) in Nursing and must hold an active Registered Nurse (RN) license. In addition, they will typically have practice experience in a specialty area prior to applying to one of Michigan's graduate nursing degree programs. Once accepted into a specific specialty graduate nursing program, they will graduate with a specialized focus area and specific role to become an Advanced Practice Registered Nurse.

APRN's nursing education builds on the baccalaureate degree and expands to graduate-level courses in advanced physiology/pathophysiology, pharmacology, health assessment, and differential diagnosis, as well as appropriate clinical experiences throughout the graduate nursing program. At Grand Valley State University, we prepare APRNs for specialty areas, including pediatrics and geriatrics, two populations in great need of excellence in coordination of efficient care, which APRNs are uniquely qualified to do.

We are required to prepare our students to diagnose, treat and prescribe medication to their patients within their scope of practice. SB 68 would be reflective of this. When advancing to the APRN level, additional validation of competencies is required via national certification exam which ensures the ability to make independent decisions. These exams are completed under secure, proctored environments –and certainly a nursing graduate cannot pick up a phone and call a physician in the middle of a board exam to find out if they know the right answer. Yet, once they pass their national certification board exams, they are expected to practice very differently due to restrictions in this state, a result of inconsistent state regulations that are out of date. Ambiguous laws are often left to

interpretation which creates a practice environment with unnecessary barriers to practice and inhibits Michigan from being a competitive work environment. For these very reasons, some of our nursing graduates are leaving Michigan.

Our programs prepare APRNs to provide care autonomously to the extent of their nursing education and national certification. It is relevant to understand that each APRN graduates from and is nationally certified in a specific specialty program. For example, if a graduate nursing student wants to take care of sick neonates in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU), he or she would go into a Neonatal Nurse Practitioner Program to become a Neonatal Nurse Practitioner. If after several years he or she wants to take care of children instead, they would have to enroll in a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner graduate program and pass an additional national certification exam to become a Pediatric Nurse Practitioner.

The simple step of defining the scope of practice for Advanced Practice Registered Nurses that is restricted to nursing practice based on their education and national certification within the Michigan Public Health Code will help Michigan move toward a healthier state. Nurse Practitioners, Nurse-Midwives, and Clinical Nurse Specialists are essential in the process of decreasing health care costs, in increasing access and in the delivery of quality health care. The need for these primary care providers is critical to the health of our state.

This legislation will not change the established practice of consultation with physicians or referral to specialty physicians for patients with more complex issues or whose care is outside of APRN scope of practice. APRNs, like all health care professionals, have a legal and ethical obligation to consult and refer patients to specialists when needed. APRNs will continue to remain an integral part of the patient-centered care team. Nurses believe the best care comes from a patient-centered team. SB 68 promotes team-based care by allowing APRNs to become more effective team members, provide prevention and wellness services, care coordination, and quality assurance—all of which lead to better patient outcomes.

The profession of nursing holds itself to the highest level of ethical conduct and it is inconceivable to think the profession would deliberately compromise educational preparation or advocate for any level of practice that was unsafe. In fact, the public continues to rate nurses as the most trusted profession. For the past

13 years, the public has voted nurses as the most ethical and honest profession in America in Gallup's annual survey. In December 2014, 80 percent of Americans rated nurses' honesty and ethical standards as "very high" or "high," a full 15 percentage points above any other profession.

In closing, as Dean's and educators, we urge you to support SB 68. Legal authority in Michigan's Public Health Code should reflect what is already occurring in practice every day. Regulatory barriers that prohibit APRNS from practicing to their full extent of their education and national certification should be removed.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak, I would now like to turn it over to my colleague, Dr. Benkert.