



Dean of the College

March 8, 2017

To: Chairman Clay Aurand - House Education Committee
Re: Testimony in Favor of Senate Bill 100

On behalf of Benedictine College, which has an RN program, I would like to submit testimony in favor of Senate Bill 100. My name is Kimberly Shankman, and I am the Dean and Chief Academic Officer of Benedictine College. Our nursing program has been in existence since 2010, and we are proud to say that we developed the program in response to requests from local and regional health care officials who were concerned about the existing and future shortage of nurses in the area. We see our program not only as an opportunity to educate our students, but also as a way to contribute to the health and well-being of our fellow citizens in our local, state, and regional communities. It is in the same spirit that I provide this testimony in favor of Senate Bill 100.

Our view is that mental health nursing is an area of high demand, and the patients who are in mental health facilities are among the most vulnerable populations served by nurses in Kansas. Therefore, training additional highly skilled and qualified nurses and attracting them to this specialty is a significant state interest.

It is hard to recruit nurses to specialize in mental health; the job is demanding and the skill level required is high. This scholarship program could be an important tool in helping student nurses to commit to this specialty. The Bureau of Labor Statistics forecasts an increase of 19% in demand for mental health nurses by 2022, a rate higher than the predicted overall job growth in the United States in this time-frame. This spike in demand illustrates the need to train more young people in these areas, and the expansion of the nursing scholarship program put forward in Senate Bill 100 is a key step in helping to meet that need.

Mental health patients frequently suffer from chronic and severe physical ailments along with their mental health problems, and so nurses entering this area must be well prepared in the entire range of nursing practice. This requires exceptionally skilled and committed students, who have options to specialize in any number of areas. The previous exclusion of mental health facilities under the existing program served as a subtle direction signaling students away from mental health nursing. The inclusion of these facilities in this bill will level the playing field, making our best students better able to consider the rewards (and challenges) of a career in mental health nursing without a “thumb on the scale” pushing them away from this area. This will be helpful both for mental health facilities and for students who are better able to pursue their vocation on the basis of their skill and attraction to the field.

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the Benedictine College Mission as a Catholic, Benedictine, liberal arts, residential college
is the education of men and women within a community of faith and scholarship.*



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In summary, this program would address an existing (and growing) need, help train students to find a job in a high-demand field, and level the playing field between mental and physical health nursing, allowing for a better match between nurses and their areas of specialization.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kimberly C. Shankman', written in a cursive style.

Kimberly C. Shankman
Dean of the College

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