



STATE OF WASHINGTON
WASHINGTON STATE BOARD OF HEALTH

PO Box 47990 • Olympia, Washington 98504-7990

February 11, 2005

The Honorable Eileen Cody
Washington State House of Representatives
House Health Care Committee Chair
337 John L. O'Brien Building
Post Office Box 40600
Olympia, Washington 98504-0600

Dear Representative Cody:

I am writing as chair of the Washington State Board of Health to support the concepts of House Bills 1494 and 1624, which are scheduled to be heard before your committee today. Both bills aim to improve the health and educational success of school-age children by addressing the ratio of school nurses to students.

House Bill 1494 makes specific proposals on the ratio, and certification and education of school nurses. House Bill 1624 establishes a joint legislative task force to gather data, assess need, and make recommendations on an appropriate model. There is no doubt about the important role that school nurses play in addressing the medical conditions and complex social and emotional needs of today's school children. It is critical to remove health-related barriers to learning if we want children achieve their full academic potential at school. It is essential to explore best practices in school nursing and to identify those practices that most effectively address the well being, academic success and lifelong achievement of students.

The Board supports the idea of creating a joint legislative task force on student health detailed in House Bill 1624. We respectfully suggest that it may be useful to create an advisory group (made up of key stakeholders) to work in tandem with the task force and increase the potential for efficient adoption of the task forces recommendations.

The Board also supports the idea of creating a registered profession of school health aide, as proposed in House Bill 1624, as there is currently a lack of oversight and regulation of school personnel providing health care services to students. Without proper oversight and regulation, schools run the risk of inadvertently harming children and responding to legal actions that could end up financially devastating a local school system.

The Board acknowledges that there is a need to improve access to school health services and so is in support of the goals of both bills, however, we are unable to comment on some of the specific implementation issues of the bills—we leave that to the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, the State Board of Education, and the Department of Health. The Board also recognizes that the state faces a serious budget shortfall and that the Legislature will have to make many very difficult decisions about funding this session.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas Locke".

Thomas Locke, MD, MPH
Chair, Washington State Board of Health

cc: House Health Care Committee Members
Ms. Christina Hulet, Governor's Executive Policy Office
Ms. Chris Townley, Department of Health
Mr. Greg Williamson, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Ms. Kate Lykins-Brown, State Board of Education
Washington State Board of Health Members
Mr. Craig McLaughlin, State Board of Health