

68 ADVOCACY NEEDED: Protect our Nurses in Schools!

Dearest Advocates:

It is that time of the year that we all need to get involved in order to make sure our elected officials understand the importance of the issues they are currently debating on that impact children with disabilities.

I realize there are more issues that also need to be addressed during this legislative session including Unlock the Waiting lists and others but I wanted to concentrate my efforts and energy on this issue tonight.

The state of Georgia is required by law to have a balanced budget. This will be extremely difficult to do in tough economic times. Among the funding cuts proposed by Governor Perdue is to cut state funding for the Georgia school nurse program. While it would result in a savings of \$30 million dollars to the state, it does so at the risk to all children attending the public school system!

School nurses are a vital link in our educational systems' response to healthcare issues in the school. Elimination of state school nurse funding also puts an increased burden on the families of children with disabilities, as well as educational institutions.

We all need to get involved to protect those that protect our children in our schools. Below is an example letter to send to the following legislators letting them know how important our nurses are to the entire school system. Please make your letter personal and give specific examples as to why their job is so important to the educational system.

Please write/call/email the following legislators and let them know your concern:

Governor Perdue: Phone: 404-656-1776, Fax: 404-657-7332
Georgia.Governor@gov.state.ga.us

Senate: Senator Tommie Williams-Senate Pro Tempore 404-656-0089
tommie@tommiewilliams.com

Education & Youth Committee: Chair Senator Dan Webber dan.weber@senate.ga.gov 404-463-2260; Vice Chair: Senator Dan Moody dan.moody@senate.ga.gov 404-463-8055

Health & Human Services Committee: Chair Senator Don Thomas don.thomas@senate.ga.gov 404-656-6436; Vice Chair Senator Renee Unterman renee.unterman@senate.ga.gov 404-463-1368

House: Speaker of House: Rep. Glen Richardson glenn.richardson@house.ga.gov 404.656.5020

Educational Committee: Chair Rep. Brooks Coleman 404-656-9210; Vice Chair Rep. Fran Millar fran.millar@wachovia.com, 404-656-5064

Health & Human Services Committee: Chair Rep. Sharon Cooper 404-656-5069; Vice Chair Rep. Ed Rynders erynders@bellsouth.net 404-656-9210.

Here is some general information to help you when drafting your letter/email to respond to cutting nurses in the school system:

School nurses perform many different functions and are important for all children, but particularly for children with disabilities and special health care needs. Here is some information about school nurses, taken from their advocacy organization's website (<http://www.gasn.org/home/>):

- Ø There are one and a half million school-age children in Georgia, at least 13% without healthcare insurance coverage, and approximately thirty percent with chronic health conditions (i.e. asthma, diabetes, cancer, life-threatening food allergies and epilepsy) affecting ability to learn.
- Ø As many as 5 million doses of prescription medication are given annually at school—asthma medications, psychotropic controlled substances, antibiotics, seizure medications, insulin, and emergency injections for severe allergic reactions.
- Ø There are approximately fifteen million annual visits to the office or school health room for illness, medication and injury in Georgia.
- Ø Some children injured at school may be inadequately assessed and treated due to lack of a medically trained professional on site.
- Ø At least thirty percent of school age children have developed risk factors for heart disease and diabetes, which could be modified by focused health education from an on-site school nurse.
- Ø Since the school nurse program was funded in Georgia, under HB 1187, the majority of schools in Georgia have a licensed school nurse on site during at least part of the school day.
- Ø Healthy People 2010 includes the practice of school nurses in their strategy for addressing preventable threats to children's health. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends use of school nurses, not paraprofessionals, to deliver day to day nursing services and health counseling to children in schools.
- Ø The accepted national consensus on the best ratio of regular education students to school nurse is 750:1, Georgia has 1680:1, in a survey of half of the districts completed last year. Georgia ranked 44 out of 50 states on the overall child "well-being" index for 2002. There is a correlation between lower ratios of students to school nurses, and a state's higher ranking on child well-being.

Ø The school nurse provides the professional expertise to identify, assess, and monitor student health needs, with an emphasis on prevention of disease and injury and promotion of positive health by health services, health counseling, and health education.

Ø Promoting this initiative could be perhaps the single most important thing the Georgia Legislature could do to improve the health of Georgia's children statewide.

Thanks in advance for your support in this important issue. I know for a fact that both of my children have experienced a need to see the school nurse just this year and I can't imagine if there was not that person there to take care of their medical needs. It's scary! Let's all get involved and make a difference!

“UNITED – WE WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE!”

Sincerely,

Heidi

(Proud Mother to Jacob - 8 yrs old with Down syndrome and Jared - 7 yrs old)

“Help the Children Now, So They Can Help Themselves Later!”

www.heidijmoore.com

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EXAMPLE LETTER:

January 24, 2009

To: Legislators referenced above:

I am writing in support of the reinstatement of the state funding for school nurses. School nurses provide vital services to students in our public school system, as many of these students have chronic medical conditions that require skilled nursing care during the school day. Listed below are just some of the daily responsibilities a nurse has in the school setting. . These include, but are not limited to:

- Blood sugar monitoring and insulin administration for diabetic students;
- Administration of emergency glucagon injection to diabetic students who may experience a severe drop in blood sugar (hypoglycemia);
- Administration of emergency epinephrine (epi-pen) for students who may experience a sudden life threatening reaction to certain foods, insect bites or stings;
- Administration of nebulizer breathing treatments and/or inhalers for students who have asthma;
- Administration of emergency diastat (rectal valium) to students who may experience prolonged seizures;
- Administration of prescription medications during the school day;

- Providing special health procedures, such as catheterization, tube feedings;
- Obtaining physician's orders to administer medical care in the school setting;
- Providing health and safety education to students;
- Providing education and in-services to staff, such as CPR training, responding to diabetic emergencies, life-threatening allergic reactions, seizures, playground safety, infection control, and communicable disease prevention;
- Provide care for students and staff who may suffer an injury or an illness during the school day;
- Collaborate with parents, teachers, and physicians to write individualized health care plans for medically fragile students;
- Identify resources for families seeking specialized medical care, resources for indigent care, and resources for socioeconomic issues.

Students, parents, and teachers depend on the school nurse to provide these and many other services. Our presence in the schools allows teachers to continue educating their classes without constant interruptions to address medical needs. Additionally, this reduces liability of having unlicensed personnel perform skilled nursing procedures. Parents of medically fragile students depend heavily on school nurses to care for their children during the school day. Many parents rely on the school nurse for advice on when children can attend school, thus facilitating compliance with Georgia's compulsory attendance laws.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) indicates that other related services should be performed by qualified individuals that “-are consistent with any State-approved or State-recognized certification, licensing, registration,-” [IDEA, 2004, 612(14)(B)]. Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 protects the rights of regular and special education students who have health conditions, such as ADHD, epilepsy, diabetes, heart conditions, and many other problems. It also requires school districts to provide accommodations for such students.

As you can see, the state of Georgia has a moral, ethical, and legal responsibility to provide appropriate health care for all students in the school setting. The children in our state would be the first to suffer the negative effects of the loss of nursing services in the schools. Please reinstate state funding for school nurses in the FY 2010 budget.

(PLEASE INSERT YOUR PERSONAL STORY REGARDING HOW THIS WILL IMPACT **YOUR CHILD** AND SCHOOL. THEY NEED TO HEAR WHY IT IS SO IMPORTANT FROM THE PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES)

Sincerely,

Parent/Advocate/Provider/Teacher,etc
 Address
 Phone
 Email