



Texas AFT

A Union of Professionals

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TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION REGARDING SB 158

FEBRUARY 24, 2009

Ted Melina Raab

Texas AFT, representing more than 60,000 active and retired public and higher education employees, supports SB 158. All our members working in public schools recognize the critical role school nurses play in our student's education. Particularly on behalf our School Nurse Task Force, we thank Senator Rodney Ellis for bringing forward this common sense measure that will enable parents to be more confident and capable of ensuring their children's health.

SB 158 is based on the same premise as notification regarding the absence of a classroom teacher: If the professional whom parents assume to be working with their children will be gone for an extended period, parents ought to be notified.

The nature of a school nurse's work rarely allows them to take a whole day off, unless they are able to arrange that far in advance. To help the committee understand the importance of their work, Texas AFT-member school nurses and a concerned parent provided the following statements for your consideration.

Starla Reichek, RN, Houston Independent School District

I have been a school nurse in Houston ISD for 15 years and would appreciate your support in favor of SB 158, providing for notification of parents when a full time school nurse is not present on a school campus.

I cannot come to testify in person due to the following: I have a student with two tube feedings during the school day. (It is difficult to find another nurse to cover this procedure for this student because we do not have substitute nurses who are willing to come work in our schools for \$10.50 per hour substitute pay when they can make over \$45+ per hour elsewhere.)

In addition, during the past eight days, I have called ambulances to my campus five times. One of my students suffered a head injury. He appeared stable, but a month ago, I had another student who suffered a similar head injury on one day and was sent to the

hospital. Two days later, he lapsed into a coma at school and experienced seizures for over 30 minutes. In schools without a nurse, a student suffering such an injury does not receive a professional medical assessment and may simply be sent home with a parent or returned to class. I have even known instances when a student was sent to lie down in isolation by the school secretary if a parent is not immediately available.

So often it is simply assumed that there is a full time school nurse in every school because that has been the case in the past. That is simply not true anymore. Our services are not mandated in Texas schools and parents are unaware of this fact. They have the right to know who is taking care of their child's medical needs when they are in school. Parents are introduced to the school nurse at their child's Open House and PTA meetings, although it is not mentioned that the nurse is only there 2-3 days per week. In the Student Handbook that is sent home with the child, or on the school's website, there is a faculty listing for the school nurse, but it does not state that the nurse is only part time.

Please excuse my absence in person and accept this written testimony—I am taking care of my children today. I would like to thank you for your support of this important piece of legislation.

Debbie Harrison, a parent of a child in Houston Independent School District

My daughter is 7 years old and has Type 1 Diabetes. As a parent who has a child with special needs, I need to know she will be taken care of everyday while attending school. She needs her blood sugar monitored at least 2 times a day, sometimes 3 or more. And she does require shots of Insulin if her blood sugar is too high, which I administer myself by the school giving me a call. So it is best to know the nurse's schedule so I can plan my day accordingly if she will be absent.

Type 1 Diabetes can not be taken lightly. And having Anne Delay, the nurse at Poe Elementary School, caring for my daughter, completely puts my mind at ease. She is truly a God-send and someone that I appreciate everyday for taking care of my little girl; without Anne, I don't know what I would do.

A school nurse is not a privilege for us, it is the right of knowing our children are being cared for in a professional manner.

Lucille Hollander, school nurse

Each child has a right, not just a God given right but here in Texas a statutory right, to an education. This includes the many children that are health impaired. Here we are speaking not only of the severely impaired who need gastrostomy feedings, oxygen, and the like but the more common and even more potentially life threatening conditions such as asthma and diabetes.

While school districts are somewhat shielded from liability by statute, especially in giving medications, unless their non licensed personnel are grossly negligent, it may amount to gross negligence to fail to inform a parent of a medically fragile child that, after the parent has supplied the school with doctor's orders, information, and so on, dies or is injured because of the lack of a nurse when that parent relied on the presence of a nurse in her educational plans for her child.

I do have personal testimony: One of my children stayed with his father and attended an HISD school for a while, several years ago. Unfortunately he has insulin dependent diabetes and to stay alive must take 4 shots a day for the rest of his life.

I was horrified to learn from my son that on the days that the school nurse was not in the building, he had to bicycle home in the middle of the school day to give himself insulin and then bicycle back; the school never notified me of this fact. When I learned of this I made arrangements that he be given insulin at school, but it does not take a rocket scientist to realize what liability the district would have incurred if my child had been killed or injured bicycling home in a poor neighborhood because I did not realize there was no nurse there that day, and that my son would be forced to leave school for his medication.

If parents are not notified that a nurse is not at their child's school full time, it places both the child and the district at grave risk: the child is at risk for health issues, and the district is at risk for legal issues.

I would be pleased to work with any attorney who is representing a child who has been injured because the parent relied on the presence of the nurse, the parent was not told the nurse was not full time, and the child suffered as a result.

I have several diabetics here at my school and a number of asthmatics who receive medication regularly because of episodes of shortness of breath. If one of these children was yours, wouldn't you want to know whether their nurse would not be at the school for significant amounts of time?