

**To:** Members of the House Michigan Competiveness Committee

**From:** Rebekah Smith, RN, President and CEO  
St. Joseph Mercy Port Huron (SJMPH)

**Date:** October 1, 2014

**Subject:** House Bill 4148 Allowing Community Colleges the Authority to Grant  
Baccalaureate Degrees in Applied Technical Areas

SJMPH Position: **Support**

St. Joseph Mercy Port Huron hospital supports House Bill (HB) 4148 which would allow community colleges to grant baccalaureate degrees in nursing, ski area management, wastewater treatment technology, allied health, information technology and manufacturing technology. HB 4148, as introduced, requires community colleges to offer Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degrees specifically.

Providing community colleges the authority to grant baccalaureate degrees in nursing would be huge for our organization and community. As a leading health care provider to residents in St. Clair County, Michigan (and surrounding areas), we often struggle to employ BSN nurses because they have relocated to obtain this degree. It is also very difficult for the nurses we do have to return to college to continue their education and obtain this degree due to the travel time required. Many of our nurses also have families; adding a 100 plus mile drive for one evening class is most often not achievable, not to mention the expense of mileage itself.

Health care is changing at a rapid pace. With these changes, our institutions are being held to heightened levels of accountability. We support collaborative care, best practice and cost-savings through efficiencies. To meet these standards, our colleagues must continue their education. Currently, there is not a feasible way for them to achieve this.

We also believe that quality of care should not be compromised because one chooses to live in a smaller community. Our nurses should have the opportunity to advance their practice and knowledge and that our patients deserve the benefits of what a higher trained nurse could offer them. There is also clear documentation of patient safety and improved health in organizations where a high percentage of bachelor degree prepared nursing staff are present.

It is my hope that the decision-making metrics being used to arrive at a conclusion for this proposal are lead with quality and patient safety at the forefront. Anything less would be a disservice to the citizens entrusted to us or any provider with their personal health care needs. If you should choose not to support this HB 4148, I am asking you to consider the life of the person who, without question, will depend on it.



September 22, 2014

09-24-2014 RCVD

President Robert Harrison  
Lake Michigan College  
2755 E. Napier Ave.  
Benton Harbor, MI 49022

Dear Dr. Harrison:

It has come to my attention that Lake Michigan College is interested in supporting the Registered Nurse profession by adding a BSN completion program to their curriculum. Please accept this letter as evidence of my support for this idea. As the Vice President for Patient Care Services and the Chief Nursing Executive for Lakeland Regional Health System, I am excited that Lake Michigan College is demonstrating its commitment to health care excellence for our community in such a proactive manner.

Lakeland is the largest employer in our community. It is also the largest healthcare system in the region, so our ability to provide excellent healthcare to the citizens of our community is vitally important. We are continually striving to enhance the skill sets and abilities for our associates. The majority of our registered nurses are graduates of Lake Michigan College who graduate with an Associates Degree in Nursing. This is an excellent entry level credential, but we are always looking at ways to "raise the bar". Having a BSN completion program at Lake Michigan College would provide an affordable, high quality educational opportunity for our nurses.

We now partner with various educational institutions from Michigan and Indiana which allows our nurses to get their BSN degrees. Each of our partners bring something to the table, but Lake Michigan College would be the only institution that would have a completion program with faculty located on site and able to give individualized education to our nurses. The Indiana program is a good one; it is also expensive and does not support our local economy. We believe that we have a responsibility to ensure that the users of our service receive value for spending their healthcare dollar at Lakeland. We also want to provide value to our associates who continue their education. Our tuition reimbursement and scholarship programs help our associates afford the cost of continuing their education. We want to ensure that we can continue to support our associate's educational aspirations by supporting the best value in learning opportunities as well. We believe that partnering with Lake Michigan College will allow us to achieve this goal.

I fully support the BSN completion program at Lake Michigan College. This is a needed program in Southwest Michigan. Please continue to work toward fruition of this program.

Sincerely,

Dr. Eileen Willits  
Vice President Patient Care Services & CNE