COLUMBUS
COMMUNITY HOSPITAL

August 24, 2022

Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services
Licensure Unit
Attn: Technical Review Committee
PO Box 95026
Lincoln, NE 68509-5026

Attn: Technical Review Committee, Board of Health, and Dr. Anthone

My name is Dorothy Bybee, and I am the Chief Nursing Officer of Columbus Community Hospital in Columbus NE. I am writing to urge you to recommend against the licensing of Anesthesiologist Assistants (AAs) in Nebraska. It is vitally important to Nebraska rural hospitals to maintain health care services in our local communities. These facilities serve to stabilize trauma patients for transfer, deliver babies, perform routine procedures and surgeries, and provide lifesaving care during a pandemic. Rural hospitals are not only a lifeline for patients, but for the entire community.

CRNAs provide the majority of anesthetic care in Nebraska and 100% of the anesthetics delivered at Columbus Community. CRNAs are educated and trained to manage complex patients and situations independently. CRNAs earn a bachelor of science in nursing degree and work on average, 3-7 years with critically ill patients in intensive care units before returning to an accredited nurse anesthesia program for an additional three years of rigorous didactic and clinical education. Currently, approximately 64,000 CRNAs practice in the United States in both rural and urban settings.

Anesthesiologists Assistants (AAs) were first introduced in Ohio and Georgia over 40 years ago. To date there are approximately 3,000 in the United States. They reside primarily in Ohio, Georgia, and Florida. An AA requires the direct on-site physical presence of a physician anesthesiologist at all times. Therefore, in hospitals like Columbus Community Hospital, where we depend on independent CRNAs; licensure of AAs will not alleviate access to care issues. Instead, they only stand to decrease the number of recruitable CRNAs to underserved rural areas due to the negative impact licensure will cause to CRNA schools and clinical sites.

Nebraska should prioritize educating, recruiting, and retaining independently licensed CRNAs and physicians to ensure continued quality and access to care. AAs are not the answer to the healthcare shortage in the immediate future. In fact, introducing AAs in Nebraska will only further exacerbate the shortage of our independent providers. Rural hospitals depend on CRNAs to keep their doors open by providing quality, cost-effective care.

Licensure of AAs would be bad for Nebraska because:

- They cannot practice independently.
- They increase cost.
- They do not improve patient access to anesthesia services.

I urge you to recommend AGAINST licensure of Anesthesiologist Assistants.

Dorothy Bybee

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Columbus Community Hospital