



## Someone you should know

by Jan Lanier JD, RN -- Liaison Public Policy Committee



Registered nurse, educator, researcher, mother, advocate, and as of January 3, 2023, a member of the Ohio House of Representatives District 27, which includes parts of Loveland, Symmes Township, Terrace Park, Indian Hills, Anderson Township, Newton, Mt. Lookout, Hyde Park, East Walnut Hills, Avondale, and Evanston. Those words describe one person **Representative-elect Rachel Baker**. When she assumes her seat at the statehouse, she will bring her passion for making a genuine difference to a new and challenging role. Rachel Baker is someone nurses should know.

Baker did not start her career in health care as a nurse. She earned a bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Michigan in social work and worked as a pediatric medical social worker for two years caring for children who were in remission from childhood cancer to address the learning and long-term impacts of chemotherapy on their social, emotional, and educational growth. During those two years, she saw the role nurses were playing in patients' lives and decided to add nursing to her skill set. By combining the skills she was mastering as a social worker with the science of nursing she believed she would have a more positive tangible effect on those she cared for. After earning a degree in nursing from the University of Cincinnati, she spent 17 years at Cincinnati Children's Hospital working in an endocrinology unit caring primarily for children with diabetes. In that capacity she was able to see her patients benefit from the science of diabetes care, while emotionally supporting children and their families, advocating for them as they navigated the reality of living with a chronic condition, and teaching them the skills needed to live full productive lives.

While working in the endocrinology unit, she also had experience with the hospital's clinical research center caring for patients from a variety of disciplines who were participating in a research study and needed in-patient care for multiple reasons. At first that assignment was daunting, but she grew to like the challenges inherent in the role and nursing research eventually became a passion. She earned her PhD in nursing research in 2003 from the University of Cincinnati and now works for the TriHealth system overseeing the nursing

evidence-based practice and research program where she teaches and advocates for nurses engaging in and using research at the bedside. She is also an adjunct professor at several Cincinnati-area nursing education programs.

Baker insists winning a house seat does not mean she is leaving nursing behind. In fact, she intends to continue her practice as a nurse researcher. And she believes the skills she uses as a nurse will serve her well in her new role, “I have had tough conversations, worked with people holding diverse views, identified common goals, and facilitated collaboration”. She intends to bring positivity, civility, authenticity, open-mindedness, and thoughtful data-driven decisions to the statehouse.

Baker describes herself as someone who likes to learn, who likes to push herself, and who likes to get things done. That push led her to explore a role in public policymaking because she saw how policy decisions impacted patient care and her practice as a nurse. Her three children convinced her to run for the House seat—a race she admits she would not have been surprised to lose. They assured her they would pitch in to help with household chores so she could meet her campaign responsibilities, and they did. In fact, her middle child became quite the campaigner himself!



House District 27 was redrawn in the recent redistricting process to slightly favor a democratic candidate 51-49%, but her margin of victory over her republican opponent, Jennifer Giroux, was a solid 55% to 44%. She will be a new face in the statehouse who describes herself as a “voice of reason, integrity, and compassion.” Her election night victory marks the beginning of yet another phase of her career —elected official. Her victory means she will join five other health care professionals (two physicians serving in the Ohio Senate, two in the Ohio House, and one other registered nurse in the Ohio House) who make up Ohio’s 132-member General Assembly).

How much Baker will be able to accomplish initially remains to be seen, but after attending new member orientation she came away convinced she can make a difference. As a freshman lawmaker in the minority party, she realizes year one will be a steep learning curve; however, she hopes to find ways to work with members of both parties to address real problems that may not make the front pages of the paper, but that need to be addressed by those who have the means to do so.

She encourages nurses to become more visible advocates on a variety of issues. There’s an element of health to almost everything legislators deal with, and nurses need to speak up even on bills that may not be before the health committee. “Nurses need to take policy advocacy to another level,” she advises; and she worries nurses are not being heard on matters that affect patient outcomes. Scope of practice matters and related issues typically are the focus for

nurses' advocacy efforts, but we need to be more consistently visible on other issues as well. When asked how nurses might help her, she replied, "Become more involved. Be more visible. Broaden your perspectives."

"We need a win, so we need to find a way to make that happen." And Rep. Baker is looking forward to working with nurses and OHRN to get that win.