

September 21, 2023

The Hon. Bernie Sanders
Chairman
Senate HELP Committee
United States Senate
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Hon. Roger Marshall, MD
Ranking Member
HELP Subcommittee on Primary Health and
Retirement Security
United States Senate
725 Senate Hart Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Marshall:

On behalf of the American Nurses Association (ANA), I commend the Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP) for recognizing the significant and increasingly dire health care workforce challenges our country faces. We thank the HELP Committee for taking meaningful steps towards addressing this challenge by marking up the *Bipartisan Primary Care and Health Workforce Expansion Act* (S. 2840). Nurses around the country appreciate this committee's efforts to address America's growing health care workforce shortage crisis in a bipartisan manner.

ANA is the premier organization representing the interests of the nation's 5 million registered nurses (RNs), through its constituent and state nurses associations, organizational affiliates, and individual members. RNs serve in multiple direct care, care coordination, and administrative leadership roles, across the full spectrum of health care settings. RNs provide and coordinate patient care, educate patients and the public about various health conditions, and provide advice and emotional support to patients and their family members. ANA members also include those practicing in the four advanced registered nurse (APRN) roles: nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, certified nurse-midwives, and certified registered nurse anesthetists. ANA is dedicated to partnering with health care consumers to improve practices, policies, delivery models, outcomes, and access across the health care continuum.

America's health care workforce shortage crisis has been decades in the making because of a myriad of factors, including mandatory overtime, workplace violence, inadequate investment in the health and wellness of nurses, and other factors. These factors have resulted in symptoms in health care workers commonly referred to as burnout. The nursing community is at the forefront of the burnout phenomenon, which has resulted in a sharp uptick of nurses quitting their jobs, retiring early, or leaving the profession altogether. In fact, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that our nation needs a minimum of 1.1 million additional registered nurses to meet the demands of our healthcare delivery system. This troubling trend will have an increasingly detrimental impact on patients' access to quality health care services. With this reality in mind, ANA thanks the HELP Committee for taking meaningful action on this issue and respectfully submits the following feedback for its consideration.

Title II: Supporting the Health Care Workforce

Section 205 – Nurse Education Practice, Quality, and Retention Program.

ANA applauds the bill’s proposed funding to nonprofit community colleges and state universities to increase the number of students enrolled in accredited, two-year RN programs. Many aspiring nurses pursue the nursing profession with varying circumstances that make it very difficult to pursue a four-year Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) program from the beginning of their nursing education. Some students pursue a nursing degree as part of a career pivot after previously attaining a college degree, while others face financial or family constraints that lead them to pursue an associate’s degree in nursing.

While we support increasing the number of students enrolled in two-year RN programs, BSN, nursing masters, and doctorate programs should be eligible for this additional funding stream. Having higher rates of BSN-prepared nurses in hospitals is associated with lower rates of heart failure, decubitus ulcers, failure to rescue, medication errors, & procedural errors¹. In fact, the National Academy of Medicine issued a report in 2010, titled *The Future of Nursing*, that recommended increasing the percentage of nurses with a baccalaureate degree to 80 percent by 2020². In response, ANA, the American Association of Community Colleges, the Association of Community College Trustees, the National League for Nursing, and the National Organization for Associate Degree Nursing, endorsed a shared goal of academic progression for all nursing students and graduates.

Sections 206 & 207 – Nurse Faculty Loan Program, Nurse Faculty Demonstration Program.

The nurse faculty shortage remains a major impediment to educating additional nursing students and graduating them into the nursing profession, as well as upskilling more registered nurses into masters and doctoral programs. In fact, U.S. nursing schools turned down more than 91,000 qualified applications from baccalaureate and graduate nursing programs in 2021 due to an insufficient number of faculty, clinical sites, classroom space, clinical preceptors, and budget constraints. Most nursing schools responding to the survey pointed to faculty shortages as a top reason for not accepting all qualified applicants into their programs.³ The proposed reauthorization and funding of the Nurse Faculty Loan Program will help ensure that we support graduate students who are committed to serving as faculty members to educate the next generation of nurses.

A contributing factor to the ongoing faculty shortage is the vast wage difference between new nursing faculty and new nurses in clinical facilities. Consequently, nursing school graduates riddled with debt often make the economically rational decision to pursue more lucrative career opportunities in the nursing profession. The proposed Nurse Faculty Demonstration Program would fund grants to help close the salary gap between nursing faculty and nurse clinicians.

¹ <https://www.aacnursing.org/Portals/0/PDFs/Fact-Sheets/Education-Impact-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

² <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/12956/the-future-of-nursing-leading-change-advancing-health>

³ <https://www.aacnursing.org/news-data/fact-sheets/nursing-faculty-shortage>

Section 208 – NURSE Corps Scholarship and Loan Repayment Program.

ANA appreciates the bill’s proposed reauthorization and funding of the Nurse Corps Scholarship and Loan Repayment Program. This program provides nursing students with scholarship and loan repayment incentives to work in healthcare facilities that are experiencing a critical shortage of nurses. By continuing to fund this critical program, Congress is working toward addressing healthcare disparities faced by underserved communities in urban and rural settings.

Section 209 – Primary Care Nurse Practitioner Training Programs.

According to the latest estimates, the shortage of primary care physicians in the United States is projected to be around 21,000 – 55,000 physicians over the next decade.⁴ Consequently, nurse practitioners (NPs) have been leading the charge to fill this void in primary care. In fact, NPs already make up around 50 percent of the primary care workforce. The Primary Care Nurse Practitioner Training Program would award funding to health centers to train NPs in primary care, thereby resulting in 350 additional NPs in primary care settings who are trained to care for underserved populations. On a technical note, ANA would prefer the term “residency” be amended to “fellowship” which is more consistent with programs like the one described in this section for the advanced practice nursing professions.

In closing, I would like to thank you for your leadership and for your willingness to consider our perspective on this critical legislation to ensure that the nursing workforce is robust today and in the future. ANA stands ready to work with the HELP Committee to implement policy solutions to comprehensively address the nation’s health workforce challenges. If you have any questions, please contact Tim Nanof, Vice President of Policy and Government Affairs, at (301) 628-5081 or Tim.Nanof@ana.org.

Sincerely,



Debbie Hatmaker, PhD, RN, FAAN
Chief Nursing Officer/EVP

cc: Jennifer Mensik Kennedy, PhD, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN, ANA President
Loressa Cole, DNP, MBA, RN, NEA-BC, FAAN, ANA Chief Executive Officer

⁴ [The Complexities of Physician Supply and Demand: Projections From 2018 to 2033 \(aamc.org\)](https://www.aamc.org)