

Nursing is a Professional Degree

The Issue

The Department of Education finalized a rule excluding post-baccalaureate nursing programs from the list of “professional programs” under its federal student aid framework.

- This is a technical classification decision made by ED during implementation, not required by statute.
- The rule subjects nursing students to inadequate federal student loan access.
- It creates a federal barrier for individuals seeking to enter the nursing workforce at a time of ever-increasing demand for more nurses.

Many post-baccalaureate nursing programs operate on accelerated, year-round (trimester) schedules designed to produce nurses faster. Under the Department’s new federal loan limits, students in these programs reach annual borrowing caps more quickly, increasing the likelihood they cannot complete their program without disruption.

The Solutions

Nursing is a Professional Degree Act (H.R. 8691 / S. 4568)

This legislation would:

- Correct ED’s classification so nursing is appropriately treated within the “professional program” framework.
- Ensure post-baccalaureate nursing students receive consistent treatment with comparable programs.
- Remove a federal policy that would constrain workforce entry.

Leads: Rep. Jen Kiggans (VA) as well as Sens. Jeff Merkley (OR) and Roger Wicker (MS)

H.J. Res.189 / S.J. Res.196

This resolution would:

- Provide for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the Department of Education relating to "Reimagining and Improving Student Education-Federal Student Loan Program Final Regulations."
- Use the Congressional Review Act (CRA) process to repeal the entire ED rule for all affected programs.
- Strengthen access to care in rural communities and reduce entry barriers.
- Ensure patients can access care without expanding federal programs.

Leads: Reps. Suzanne Bonamici (OR), Lauren Underwood (IL), John Mannion (NY), as well as Sens. Jeff Merkley (OR) and Angela Alsobrooks (MD)

Professional Student Degree Act (H.R. 6718)

This legislation would:

- Expand ED’s narrow definition of “professional” degrees to include nursing, physician associates, social work, physical therapy, occupational therapy, public health, and education programs.
- Allow these students to qualify for higher federal loan limits.
- Align federal aid with licensed, high-demand professions facing shortages.

Leads: Reps. Michael Lawler (NY), Don Bacon (NE), Robert Bresnahan (PA), and Jen Kiggans (VA).

Facts at a Glance

- Rule limits post-baccalaureate nursing students to \$20,500 annual and \$100,000 lifetime on student loans.
- Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) are not simply registered nurses with more education. They are trained in entirely new professions and scopes of practice.
- There is already a nursing faculty shortage, and this rule will exacerbate this shortage and decrease the number of nurses the U.S. can produce.
- The House Appropriations Committee unanimously approved a manager’s amendment to the FY2027 LHHS funding package that adds advance nursing degrees into the “professional” category, reinforcing that it was not Congress’s intent to exclude nursing programs from the higher federal student loan limit.

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