

For Immediate Release

Tri-Council for Nursing Urges Nurses to Submit Comments on Department of Education's Professional Degree Designation Rule

WASHINGTON, D.C., February 4, 2026 – The U.S. Department of Education proposed rule related to the implementation of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act excludes nursing from the professional degree designation, a decision that contradicts workforce realities, federal policy and basic economics. The [Tri-Council for Nursing](#) calls on all nurses to submit public comments requesting the inclusion of post-baccalaureate nursing degrees (MSN, DNP, Ph.D.) explicitly in the list of professional degrees before the March 2 deadline.

All states mandate graduate-level education as a requirement for licensure for advanced practice registered nurses—nurse practitioners, clinical nurse specialists, certified registered nurse anesthetists and certified nurse midwives—under the APRN Consensus Model. Their education includes science-based curricula, extensive supervised clinical training and nationally consistent licensure standards that meet or exceed other designated professional degrees.

Bureau of Labor Statistics data show most APRNs earn mean annual wages of \$132,000 (nurse practitioners), \$231,700 (nurse anesthetists), and \$128,110 (nurse midwives). BLS projects 35% APRN growth through 2034—ten times the national average for all occupations—with 32,700 annual openings. APRNs hold indispensable professional roles driving healthcare delivery nationwide, especially as there continues to be shortages of primary, behavioral health, maternal health and other providers across rural and underserved areas.

The administration's \$50 billion Rural Health Transformation grant program under the OBBBA incentivizes APRN utilization by rewarding states that expand nurse practitioner scope of practice and support population health infrastructure by expanding scope of practice for other providers. Excluding nursing from the professional degree designation directly undermines this federal investment and harms rural communities and Medicare beneficiaries who depend on APRNs for care.

Sixty-nine percent of post-baccalaureate nursing students rely on federal loans, but average annual costs (\$38,500) nearly double the proposed graduate loan limit. American Association of Colleges of Nursing data show:

- **78%** of deans expect the \$20,500 annual loan cap to reduce enrollment
- **70%** anticipate enrollment drops from the \$100,000 lifetime cap
- **82%** of students report the annual cap will negatively affect their ability to finance education
- **81%** say the lifetime cap will have similar impact

National standards require nursing program directors to hold doctoral degrees and faculty to possess graduate-level nursing education. Schools are currently unable to admit thousands of qualified applicants because they lack sufficient faculty. Undermining the professional degree designation will only intensify this crisis and further diminish the nation's supply of doctorally-prepared faculty, researchers and scientists.

Policymakers need to hear directly from nurses about what's at stake. Your voice matters. Submit your public comment by March 2 on [regulations.gov](#). Tell the Department of Education why nursing is a professional degree. Share your story. Our health care system cannot operate without advanced practice nurses and nurse faculty.

The [Tri-Council for Nursing](#)—comprising AACN, ANA, AONL, NCSBN and NLN—represents the nation's leading nursing organizations and speaks for the full continuum of the nursing profession.

About the American Association of Colleges of Nursing

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) is the voice for academic nursing representing more than 875 member schools of nursing at public and private institutions nationwide. AACN works to establish quality standards for nursing education; assists schools in implementing those standards; influences the nursing profession to improve health care; and promotes public support for professional nursing education, research and practice. Learn more at aacnnursing.org.

About the American Nurses Association

As the oldest organization representing more than 5 million registered nurses, the American Nurses Association stands at the forefront of advancing nursing excellence. The association harnesses The Power of Nurses™ to champion the profession and drive transformation in healthcare. Through legislative and political advocacy, comprehensive educational services, and the profession's leading Code of Ethics and Scope and Standards, the association empowers nurses across every specialty and practice setting. The association is committed to ensuring healthy work environments, shaping pioneering policies, and cultivating partnerships that enhance both the nursing profession and the broader healthcare experience. Learn more at nursingworld.org/ana.

About the American Organization for Nursing Leadership

As the national professional organization of more than 12,500 nurse leaders, the American Organization for Nursing Leadership is the voice of nursing leadership. Our membership encompasses nurse leaders working in hospitals, health systems, academia and other care settings across the care continuum. For more information, visit AONL.org.

About the National League for Nursing

Dedicated to excellence in nursing, the National League for Nursing is the premier organization for nurse faculty and leaders in nursing education. The NLN offers professional development, networking opportunities, testing services, nursing research grants, and public policy initiatives to its nearly 45,000 individual and 1,000 institutional members, comprising nursing education programs across the spectrum of higher education and health care organizations. Learn more at NLN.org.

About the National Council of State Boards of Nursing

Empowering and supporting nursing regulators across the world in their mandate to protect the public, the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) is an independent, not-for-profit organization. As a global leader in regulatory excellence, NCSBN champions regulatory solutions to borderless health care delivery, agile regulatory systems and nurses practicing to the full scope of their education, experience and expertise. A world leader in test development and administration, NCSBN's NCLEX Exams are internationally recognized as preeminent nursing examinations. NCSBN's membership is comprised of the nursing regulatory bodies (NRBs) in the 50 states, the District of Columbia and four U.S. territories. There are nine exam user members and 21 associate members that are either NRBs or empowered regulatory authorities from other countries or territories. For more information, visit ncsbn.org.