



Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation

Division of Professional Regulation

PAT QUINN
Governor

MICHAEL T. McRAITH
Acting Secretary

DANIEL E. BLUTHARDT
Director
Division of Professional Regulation

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Dear Congressperson:

Nurses form the backbone of our healthcare delivery system, yet despite having the largest professional nursing workforce in the world, the U.S. healthcare system remains in critical condition due to a dire shortage of registered nurses. Simple math says it all: Some three million nurses serve a national population of more than 300 million. That's one nurse per 100 persons.

As demand for trained nurses continues to grow, the number of people who enter the field is, at best, a trickle. Nationally by 2025, it's projected that the nursing shortage will be as high as 500,000. During the next five years in Illinois alone, there's an expected shortfall of about 20,000 nurses.

These challenges come at a time when more and more Baby Boomers will be entering their senior years with the expectation that many will be making doctor and hospital visits. Between 2000 and 2020, the number of people who need quality health care is projected to skyrocket by 31 percent, but the number of potential caregivers—including registered nurses—is projected to drop by more than 4 percent.

Fewer nurses now means less in the future because shrinking numbers also highlight the downtrend in the number of people who teach up-and-coming nurses. The ripple effect already is being felt today at all 123 of the nursing schools in Illinois. For every qualified nursing school applicant, another is turned away as a result of the nursing faculty shortage. In 2006, officials with Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) stated that the U.S. must graduate 90 percent more nurses from nursing programs to keep up with the growing need.

Today's registered nurses and other caregivers will continue to be stretched thin due to ever increasing patient loads. Change needs to happen now, both at the local and federal levels to supplement efforts already in place. More investments in nursing education are needed to fix the weakened system.

Positive steps are taking place in Illinois. Regional stakeholders and state agency leaders are working together on solutions. The Illinois Board of Higher Education has two such programs to incentivize students and faculty members:

- Nursing School Grant Program: The purpose is to increase the number of nurses graduating from Illinois colleges and universities. Three schools were selected for participation: Loyola University of Chicago; City Colleges of Chicago-Truman College; and Northern Illinois University. To date, more than 400 additional nursing students have participated in the program.
- Nurse Educator Fellowship Award: Retaining well-qualified nursing faculty at Illinois' nursing schools is the goal of this annual program, which awards 15 nursing school faculty members \$10,000 each for exemplary performance. To date, 45 nursing educators have been honored statewide.

The results of these programs are promising, but more work is needed. That's why the Illinois Center for Nursing is asking for your support of two federal legislative initiatives to help expand our nurse education programs and bring more nurses into Illinois communities:

- The Nurse Education, Expansion and Development (NEED) Act (S. 497), sponsored by Senator Dick Durbin, would expand enrollment opportunities by providing grants to nursing schools for the hiring of additional faculty, increasing recruitment programs and other infrastructure improvements.
- The Nurses' Higher Education and Loan Repayment Act (H.R. 1460) would help attract nurse educators by establishing a federal student loan repayment program for nurses who obtain a graduate degree in nursing and agree to teach full-time at an accredited nursing school for at least four years.

We urge you to support this legislation, which we believe will help alleviate the nursing shortage and the nursing faculty shortage in Illinois. Thank you.

Very truly yours,

Illinois Center for Nursing

The Illinois Center for Nursing (ICN) was established in 2006 to advocate and ensure for the appropriate nursing resources necessary to meet the healthcare needs of the citizens of Illinois. ICN is working with industry professionals and educational institutions to ensure that Illinois has a nursing workforce necessary to meet the demands of a growing and aging population. For more information, visit the ICN website, www.nursing.illinois.gov.

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