

Member Template – Letter to the Editor

To the Editor,

As a **[nurse / nurse educator / student]** in **[local community/state]**, I am writing to express concern about the recent notice of proposed rulemaking from the Department of Education that does not include post-baccalaureate nursing programs in the list of “professional degree programs.” This oversight fails to reflect the rigorous education, licensure, and clinical preparation required of nurses and threatens access to nursing education at a time of critical workforce need.

Post-baccalaureate nursing programs, including master’s and doctoral degrees, are designed specifically to prepare nurses for practice. In fact, the Master of Science in Nursing (MSN), Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP), and a PhD in Nursing, require advanced academic coursework, extensive supervised clinical training, and compliance with strict accreditation and regulatory standards. Like other professions long recognized as professional, nursing education prepares advanced practitioners for essential roles within the healthcare system and demands a level of skill well beyond the bachelor’s degree.

[Optional personal anecdote about the importance of federal funding loans for your own career advancement]

Limiting nursing students to lower federal loan caps, particularly following the elimination of Graduate PLUS loans, will make it harder for qualified individuals to pursue advanced nursing education. This is especially true for students enrolled in full-time, year-round, and clinically intensive programs, as well as for second-career students and those committed to serving rural or underserved communities. Restricting access to federal financial aid will ultimately reduce the nursing pipeline and undermine patient access to care.

Policymakers must recognize post-baccalaureate nursing education as a professional degree pathway that is essential to the health and stability of our communities. Federal student aid policy must align with the realities of nursing education and support, rather than hinder, the preparation of the nursing workforce our country urgently needs.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[City/State]

Member Template – Op-Ed

Aligning Nursing as a Professional Degree and Federal Policy

At a time when communities across the country are facing persistent nursing shortages, federal student aid policy risks moving the nursing workforce in the wrong direction. A recent federal proposal from the Department of Education would exclude nursing from the definition of a “professional degree” program for purposes of student loan limits, a decision that fails to reflect the realities of post-baccalaureate nursing education and threatens access to care nationwide.

Post-baccalaureate nursing programs are rigorous, clinically intensive pathways designed to prepare graduates for licensed and regulated professional practice. Master’s and doctoral nursing programs require advanced coursework, extensive supervised clinical training, and adherence to strict accreditation and state regulatory standards. Graduates move directly into essential roles delivering care, educating future clinicians, conducting research, and leading health systems across urban and rural communities alike. In every meaningful sense, nursing is a professional degree.

Nevertheless, under the new federal loan framework, post-baccalaureate nursing students would be subject to lower borrowing limits reserved for “graduate” programs rather than the higher limits available to professional degree students. This distinction is especially concerning following the elimination of Graduate PLUS loans, which for decades enabled students in high-cost, clinically intensive programs to finance the full cost of attendance. For many nursing students, particularly those enrolled full time, attending year-round, or entering nursing as a second career, the proposed loan caps simply will not cover tuition and educational expenses.

The consequences of this policy choice are immediate and far-reaching. Restricting access to federal financial aid will deter qualified students from pursuing nursing education, delay program completion, and reduce the pipeline of nurses at a time when demand continues to grow. Rural and underserved communities will feel these effects most acutely, as they already face persistent challenges in recruiting and retaining healthcare professionals. Federal investments aimed at strengthening the healthcare workforce cannot succeed if the educational pathways that prepare nurses are made financially inaccessible.

Federal student aid policy should reflect the true nature of professional preparation and support programs that lead to stable employment, strong economic returns, and improved access to care. Post-baccalaureate nursing education delivers on all of these.

As policymakers consider the future of student aid, they must ensure that nursing is recognized as a professional pathway essential to public health and the strength of the nursing workforce in communities across the country.

[Name], [Title/Role], [City/State]