

September 20, 2023

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Chairman
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
Committee
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Roger Marshall M.D.
Ranking Member
Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
Subcommittee on Primary Health and
Retirement Security
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Sanders and Ranking Member Marshall:

On behalf of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), representing more than 865 schools of nursing, 530,000 nursing students, and more than 54,000 faculty, we applaud the Committee's ongoing commitment to support the healthcare needs of the nation. The Bipartisan Primary Care and Health Workforce Act (S.2840) provides positive steps forward by increasing funding for nurse faculty and reauthorizing programs such as, the National Health Service Corps, Nurse Corps, Nurse Faculty Loan Program (NFLP), and Nurse Education, Practice, Quality, and Retention (NEPQR) Program. As the Committee considers this bipartisan bill, AACN urges you to reauthorize all Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development programs, including the Nursing Workforce Diversity Program and Advanced Nursing Education Program, and supports the original language proposed in the July draft for grants for Family Nurse Practitioner Training Programs. Further, AACN strongly advocates that the Committee match the \$1.2 billion going to associate degree nursing programs for all accredited schools of nursing to support baccalaureate, graduate, and post-graduate nursing programs.

We commend your recognition of the nurse faculty shortage by providing resources for NFLP, including a one-time mandatory supplemental funding for NFLP, and supporting two years of funding for a Nurse Faculty Demonstration Program. At over \$200 million, this investment in nursing faculty is essential, particularly as we face more than 2,100 full-time faculty vacancies in baccalaureate and/or graduate programs across the country, which limits the ability of nursing schools to maintain and expand student capacity.¹

Faculty is just one piece of the puzzle when it comes to supporting academic nursing. We need additional federal resources for expanding clinical education opportunities, facilitating academic-practice partnerships, modernizing infrastructure and educational resources, and enhancing enrollment and retention of students. Maintaining enrollment in schools of nursing is becoming a growing concern as, "the number of students in entry-level baccalaureate nursing programs decreased by 1.4% last year, ending a 20-year period of enrollment growth in programs designed to prepare new

¹ American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2022). [Special Survey on Vacant Faculty Positions](https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/42/News/Surveys-Data/2022-Faculty-Vacancy-Report.pdf). Retrieved from: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/42/News/Surveys-Data/2022-Faculty-Vacancy-Report.pdf>

registered nurses (RNs).”² Further, nursing schools saw enrollment decline in baccalaureate degree-completion programs and graduate programs at the master’s and PhD levels.³ Declines in graduate nursing programs are of great concern, as these programs help prepare individuals for critical roles in administration, teaching, research, informatics, and direct patient care.

As the national voice for academic nursing, AACN recognizes how instrumental investments to strengthen nursing education pathways and academic progression are to providing high-quality health care in all communities, including rural, underserved, and urban areas. In fact, AACN “strongly believes that registered nurses (RNs) should be, at minimum, prepared with the Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) or equivalent baccalaureate nursing degree (e.g., BS in Nursing, BA in Nursing) offered at an accredited four-year college or university.”⁴ BSN nurses are prized for their skills in critical thinking, leadership, case management, and health promotion, and for their ability to practice across a variety of inpatient and outpatient settings. Unlike graduates of associate degree programs, BSN-prepared nurses enter the workforce with skills in organizational and systems leadership, evidence-based practice, healthcare policy, finance, and regulatory environments, interprofessional collaboration, and population health, according to a University of Kansas study.⁵

Federal investments in BSN-prepared nurses will ensure that patients have access to high quality care. For example:

- An increase in BSN-prepared nurses was associated with 24% greater odds of survival among patients who experienced in-hospital cardiac arrest.⁶
- Hospitals staffed with 80% BSN prepared nurses compared to hospitals staffed with only 30% BSN-prepared nurses had 24.6% lower odds of inpatient mortality.⁷
- An increase of BSN-prepared nurses was associated with 10% lower odds of death in patients with Alzheimer's disease and related dementias (ADRD).⁸
- A cross-sectional study showed that hospitals that increased their proportion of BSN-prepared nurses over time had a 32% decrease in surgical mortality cases.⁹
- Hospitals that increased their proportion of BSN-prepared nurses over time had a decrease in length of stay from 5.1 days to 4.7 days (7.8% decrease).¹⁰

² American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (May 2023). New Data Shows Enrolment Declines in Schools of Nursing, Raising Concerns About the Nation’s Nursing Workforce. Retrieved from: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/news-data/all-news/article/new-data-show-enrollment-declines-in-schools-of-nursing-raising-concerns-about-the-nations-nursing-workforce>

³ American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (May 2023). New Data Shows Enrolment Declines in Schools of Nursing, Raising Concerns About the Nation’s Nursing Workforce. Retrieved from: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/news-data/all-news/article/new-data-show-enrollment-declines-in-schools-of-nursing-raising-concerns-about-the-nations-nursing-workforce>

⁴ American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (March 2019) *Academic Progression in Nursing: Moving Together Toward a Highly Educated Nursing Workforce*. Retrieved from: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/42/News/Position-Statements/Academic-Progression.pdf>

⁵ Kumm S., Godfrey N., Martin D., Tucci M., Muenks M., Spaeth T. (2014). Baccalaureate outcomes met by associate degree nursing programs. *Nurse Educator*. Retrieved from: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24978014/>

⁶ Harrison, J.M., Aiken, L.H., Sloane, D.M., Brooks-Carthon, J.M., Merchant, R.M., Berg, R.A., & McHugh, M.D. (2019, July). In hospitals with more nurses who have baccalaureate degrees, better outcomes for patients after cardiac arrest. *Health Affairs*, 38(7), 1087-1094. DOI: 10.1377/hlthaff.2018.05064.

⁷ Porat-Dahlerbruch, J., Aiken, L. H., Lasater, K. B. Sloane, D. M. & McHugh, M. D. (2022, March). Variations in nursing baccalaureate education and 30-day inpatient surgical mortality. *Nursing Outlook*, 70(2), 300-308. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.outlook.2021.09.009>.

⁸ White, E. M., Smith, J. G., Trotta, R. L., & McHugh, M. D., (2018). Lower post surgical mortality for individuals with dementia with better-educated hospital workforce. *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, 66(6), 1137-1143.

⁹ Lasater, K. B., Sloane, D. M., McHugh, M. D., Porat-Dahlerbruch, J., & Aiken, L. H. (2021). Changes in proportion of bachelor's nurses associated with improvements in patients outcomes. *Research in Nursing & Health*, 44(5), 787-795.

¹⁰ Lasater, K. B., Sloane, D. M., McHugh, M. D., Porat-Dahlerbruch, J., & Aiken, L. H. (2021). Changes in proportion of bachelor's nurses associated with improvements in patients outcomes. *Research in Nursing & Health*, 44(5), 787-795.

Given these results, it is no surprise, “the federal government, the military, nurse executives, healthcare foundations, nursing organizations, and practice settings acknowledge the unique value of baccalaureate-prepared nurses and advocate for an increase in the number of BSN nurses across clinical settings.”¹¹

Completing a baccalaureate degree is an important step in the preparation of a professional nurse. Yet, it is only the beginning. Nurses looking to advance their expertise and impact healthcare delivery at a higher level should be encouraged to complete a master’s degree and a research-focused (i.e., PhD) or practice-focused (Doctor of Nursing Practice or DNP) doctorate. We have seen this shift, including in the 2022 National Workforce Survey which explains, “from 2015 through 2022, diplomas in nursing and ADNs decreased from 39.3% to 28.4%, while Bachelor of Science in Nursing, Master’s of Science in Nursing, DNPs, and other doctoral degrees increased from 59.9% to 70.8%.”¹² Additionally, magnet-designated hospitals, considered the gold-standard for nursing practice, require 100% of nurse leaders to have a baccalaureate or graduate nursing degree.¹³

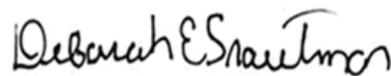
As we contend with an aging nursing workforce and the toll that COVID-19 has had on the profession, now is the time to support our nursing schools who help prepare our nation’s highly educated nursing workforce - our future frontline providers. We are encouraged by the Committee’s bipartisan work and urge you to reauthorize all Title VIII programs, support original language for Family Nurse Practitioner Training Programs, and match the \$1.2 billion going to associate degree nursing programs for all accredited schools of nursing to support baccalaureate, graduate, and post-graduate nursing programs in any final health workforce package.

As you continue to develop a path forward, AACN stands ready to serve as a resource and vital stakeholder to you and your staff. If AACN can be of any assistance, please contact AACN’s Director of Government Affairs, Rachel Stevenson, at (202) 463-6930, ext. 271 or rstevenson@aacnnursing.org.

Sincerely,



Cynthia McCurren, PhD, RN
Board Chair



Deborah E. Trautman, PhD, RN, FAAN
President and Chief Executive Officer

cc:

Senator Patty Murray
Senator Robert P. Casey

¹¹ American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (April 2023) *Fact Sheet: The Impact of Education on Nursing Practice*. Retrieved from: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/0/PDFs/Fact-Sheets/Education-Impact-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

¹² Smiley, R., Allgeyer, R., Shobo, Y., Zhong, E., Kaminski-Ozturk, N., & Alexander, M. (April 2023). The 2022 National Nursing Workforce Survey. *Journal of Nursing Regulation*. Retrieved from: [https://www.journalofnursingregulation.com/article/S2155-8256\(23\)00047-9/fulltext](https://www.journalofnursingregulation.com/article/S2155-8256(23)00047-9/fulltext)

¹³ Magnet Recognition Program. Eligibility Criteria. Retrieved from: <https://www.nursingworld.org/organizational-programs/magnet/apply/eligibility-criteria/>

Senator Tammy Baldwin
Senator Christopher Murphy
Senator Tim Kaine
Senator Maggie Hassan
Senator Tina Smith
Senator Ben Ray Lujan
Senator John Hickenlooper
Senator Ed Markey
Ranking Member, Senator Bill Cassidy
Senator Rand Paul
Senator Susan Collins
Senator Lisa Murkowski
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Senator Tommy Tuberville
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Senator Ted Budd