



February 4, 2022

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chairwoman
Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor and Pensions
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor and Pensions
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

As the national voice for academic nursing, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) thanks you for your leadership in developing legislation to strengthen our country's preparedness and capabilities to respond to public health challenges. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, nurse educators, nursing students, and practicing nurses have answered the call, providing care to patients across the country. The current pandemic has highlighted shortcomings that Congress can address in order to enhance our public health infrastructure, workforce, and preparedness, both now and in the future. AACN applauds the bipartisan work on the Prepare for and Respond to Existing Viruses, Emerging New Threats, and Pandemics Act (PREVENT Pandemics Act) and welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on this discussion draft.

AACN represents nearly 840 schools of nursing that educate more than 580,000 baccalaureate, graduate, and post-graduate students and employ over 52,000 faculty members. Collectively, these institutions graduate registered nurses (RNs), advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs), educators, researchers, and frontline providers. Our member schools are committed to preparing a highly educated nursing workforce and strengthening the foundation of nursing science, not only as we confront existing health challenges, but as we provide tomorrow's equitable and innovative healthcare solutions. Given this, AACN encourages the Committee to consider the following feedback to the PREVENT Pandemics Act.

TITLE I—STRENGTHENING FEDERAL AND STATE PREPAREDNESS

Subtitle A – Federal Leadership and Accountability

Sec. 101. Comprehensive review of the COVID–19 response.

AACN applauds the establishment of a National Task Force on the Response of the United States to the COVID–19 Pandemic. Given the integral role played by nursing schools, faculty, and student in response efforts, AACN strongly urges the Committee to ensure nursing is fully represented on this task force so they can inform and engage in the dialogue on preparedness planning and response.

Sec. 104. Strengthening public health communication.

AACN is pleased to see the discussion draft direct the establishment of a Public Health Information and Communications Advisory Committee. AACN recognizes the vital role that current and future nurses have in developing and disseminating public health information and resources across the country, not only during COVID-19, but in other past public health challenges as well. Therefore,

AACN recommends that nursing be delineated amongst the expertise types, and that nursing is included as a voting member of the Committee, in this discussion draft.

Subtitle B – State and Local Readiness

Sec. 112. Supporting access to mental health and substance use disorder services during public health emergencies.

AACN commends inclusion of a required report to Congress describing steps the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) can take to improve the provision of mental health and substance use disorder services during, and in response to, public health emergencies. This report recognizes the importance of ensuring access to these services, especially during emergency periods when their need is often magnified. Nursing expertise is rightly included amongst the eligibility for service on the SAMHSA advisory council responsible for providing feedback informing this report. Further, as the Committee considers additional policies designed to increase access to mental health and substance use disorder services and practitioners, AACN strongly encourages the Committee to explicitly include nursing students, faculty, and nurses, including psychiatric-mental health nurse practitioners.

TITLE II—IMPROVING PUBLIC HEALTH PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE CAPACITY

Ensure Nursing Education Pathways Remain Strong During Current and Future Public Health Challenges

The strain the COVID-19 pandemic has placed on our healthcare system illustrates the vital need for increased investment in nursing education. Even prior to COVID-19, demand for additional nurses was expected to increase with the Bureau of Labor Statistics projecting the need for RNs to increase 9% by 2030, representing a call for an additional 276,800 RNs.¹ The need for APRNs was even greater with demand for most roles expected to grow by 45%.²

The Future Advancement of Academic Nursing (FAAN) Act ([S. 246](#)) reflects those needs by providing additional investments into nursing education, while addressing immediate public health infrastructure support and long-term emergency preparedness strategies. From enrolling and retaining under-represented students and nursing faculty to expand clinical education opportunities and modernizing nursing education programs, ensuring the next generation of nurse leaders are available to meet the nation's healthcare demands is foundational and essential. As such, AACN strongly urges inclusion of the FAAN Act (S. 246) in the PREVENT Pandemics Act.

¹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2020). Occupational Outlook Handbook- Registered Nurses. Retrieved from: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/registered-nurses.htm>

² U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2020). Occupational Outlook Handbook- Nurse Anesthetists, Nurse Midwives, and Nurse Practitioners. Retrieved from: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/nurse-anesthetists-nurse-midwives-and-nursepractitioners.htm>

Subtitle A - Addressing Disparities and Improving Public Health Emergency Responses

Sec. 201. Addressing social determinants of health and improving health outcomes.

AACN applauds the Committee for providing resources for evidence-based projects to improve health outcomes and reduce health disparities by addressing social determinants of health. Schools of nursing, nurse scientists, and researchers play an important role in eliminating health inequity and addressing social determinants of health. As such, AACN recommends the Committee explicitly include schools of nursing amongst the eligible entities able to receive resources to identify, facilitate the development of, and disseminate best practices to address social determinants of health.

Subtitle C—Revitalizing the Public Health Workforce

Sec. 221. Improving recruitment and retention of the frontline public health workforce.

The drastic shortage of public health professionals has come to light during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is critical that ensuring a robust supply of nurses and nursing students, a foundational component of the public health workforce, is prioritized. AACN applauds the Committee for recognizing this by including Title VIII loans as eligible for forgiveness in this section. The priority of funding recruitment and retention efforts of nursing students and nurses – including public health nurses - put forward by the Committee is commendable. However, AACN has concerns about including forgiveness for Title VIII loans under a Title VII program. As such, to ensure the intent of this draft legislation is achieved, AACN wants to work with the Committee to ensure that the aim of this legislation strikes the right balance and supports those nursing students and nurses who are on the frontlines. This way we can ensure the nursing workforce receives the resources needed to continue their public health response.

Sec. 222. Awards to support community health workers and community health.

AACN is pleased to see health professions schools included in this updated language (page 105, line 6). We recognize that not all nursing schools may fall under this designation. We would encourage the Committee to clarify that accredited schools of nursing are indeed part of the health professions schools definition.

Subtitle D—Improving Public Health Responses

Sec. 231. Centers for public health preparedness and response.

AACN supports creation of a network of Centers for Public Health Preparedness and Response and believes schools of nursing can build upon their work during the COVID-19 pandemic in support of this effort. During the pandemic, [AACN asked its member schools](#) to commit to deploying their students and faculty to support tracking, tracing, testing, and vaccination efforts. Our schools responded overwhelmingly and highlighted what they are doing locally to help citizens stay healthy. See our exemplars [here](#). As such, AACN requests that the Committee ensure schools of nursing are eligible to receive awards to participate as Centers for Public Health Preparedness and Response and continue their extraordinary public health contributions in this capacity.

Sec. 232. Vaccine distribution plans.

Authorize Nursing Students to Administer Vaccines During Future Public Health Emergencies

In the ongoing fight against COVID-19, AACN member schools, faculty, and students continue to work on the frontlines. In fact, nursing students and other health professional students have been authorized to administer COVID-19 vaccines due to an amendment the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) made to the Public Readiness and Emergency Preparedness (PREP) Act Declaration. However, the current authorization under the PREP Act ends when the COVID-19 public health emergency declaration is lifted, which means the ability of nursing students to address future health threats would be limited.

The bipartisan Student Assisted Vaccination Effort (SAVE) Act ([S.2114](#)) would build upon the successful implementation of the PREP Act amendment by making permanent the ability of qualified health professions students, including nursing students, to administer vaccines during a federally declared public health emergency. AACN urges the Committee to include the SAVE Act in the PREVENT Pandemics Act in order to permanently secure the quick mobilization of nursing students and other health professional students in vaccination efforts in all future public health challenges.

TITLE III—ACCELERATING RESEARCH AND COUNTERMEASURE DISCOVERY

AACN appreciates the discussion draft's recognition of the critical nature that research plays in preventing and combatting future health challenges. AACN recognizes that scientific research is essential to advancing evidence-based interventions, informs policy decisions, and sustains the health of the nation, a fact that has been highlighted in the rapid response to COVID-19. From addressing ongoing healthcare disparities and social determinants of health, to developing countless groundbreaking discoveries, the work at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and by nurse researchers and scientists at the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) is fundamental. The contributions of nurse researchers will be essential to our collective efforts to combat future public health challenges.

From the classroom to the frontlines, nurses and nursing students are integral members of the healthcare team. Thank you again for the opportunity to share our thoughts on this important bipartisan legislative effort to ensure our we are prepared to support the ongoing health of our nation today and in future public health emergencies. If AACN can be of any assistance to you or your staff as you advance this legislation, please do not hesitate to contact our Director of Government Affairs, Rachel Stevenson, at 202-463-6930 ext. 271 or rstenenson@aacnnursing.org.

Sincerely,



Susan Bakewell-Sachs, PhD, RN, FAAN
Board Chair



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