



April 9, 2021

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
U.S. Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor and Pensions
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member
U.S. Senate Committee on Health,
Education, Labor and Pensions
428 Senate Dirksen Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray and Ranking Member Burr:

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Committee's request for public comment on workforce development policies. As we continue to address the COVID-19 pandemic and lay the framework for sound public health and higher education infrastructure, AACN applauds your effort to bring innovative, sustainable, and inclusive policies forward.

AACN is the national voice of academic nursing, representing more than 840 schools of nursing across the country. Our member schools educate more than 560,000 students and employ more than 50,000 faculty. AACN has a vested interest in improving our nation's health and health care. For over five decades, the association has championed professional nursing education to ensure that Registered Nurses (RN) and Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRN), including nurse practitioners, certified nurse-midwives, certified registered nurse anesthetists, and clinical nurse specialists, are prepared to provide evidence-based high-quality care.

The strain this pandemic has put on our healthcare system illustrates the vital need for increased investment in nursing education. While AACN members continue to combat the coronavirus and educate our future nursing workforce, we stress that more must be done to ensure the health and wellbeing of all communities throughout the nation. Below are comments to consider as the Committee begins its bipartisan conversation to support and enhance our healthcare workforce.

How to enhance or improve workforce training in direct relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and economic recovery, including ways to address workforce needs of the health care and public health sectors.

AACN recommends that the Committee include the Future Advancement of Academic Nursing (FAAN) Act (S. 246/H.R.851) in any workforce package. The FAAN Act, introduced by Senate Nursing Caucus Co-Chair, Jeff Merkley (D-OR), along with Representatives and Registered Nurses, Lauren Underwood (D-IL-14) and Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX-30), ensures nursing education pathways remain strong during current and future public health challenges by addressing immediate infrastructure needs as well as long-term strategies.

Specifically, the FAAN Act would support schools of nursing, with priority to minority-serving institutions and those in underserved and rural areas, by providing resources to:

- **Enroll and retain nursing students to ensure the next generation of nursing leaders are available to meet the nation's healthcare demands.** Even prior to COVID-19, demand for additional nurses was expected to increase. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics the need for registered nurses is projected to increase 7% by 2029, representing a

call for an additional 221,900 nurses.¹ Additionally, demand for APRNs is expected to grow by 45%.² The FAAN Act would help ensure that enough nurses are available to meet the nation's healthcare needs by supporting the enrollment and retention of a diverse student population.

- **Hire and retain a diverse faculty to educate the future nursing workforce.** As the nation works to eliminate inequities in our healthcare system, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds, including racial and ethnic minorities, the need to increase the diversity and cultural competence of our healthcare workforce is a critical component of achieving this goal.
- **Support schools of nursing, in partnership with facilities that provide health care, to establish or expand clinical education.** A recent AACN survey found that insufficient clinical sites and clinical preceptors are a top concern for schools of nursing.³ For many, this is exacerbated by the realities of COVID-19. The FAAN Act helps address the need for more clinical education sites and preceptors, by supporting partnerships between schools of nursing and community health centers, nurse-managed clinics, and other healthcare facilities to expand this critical education component.
- **Provide infrastructure support for nursing education.** As schools of nursing continue adapting to an ever-changing learning environment, many programs have had to significantly expand their remote capabilities. This transition is especially challenging as our schools provide remote and in-person nursing clinical experiences with specific technological and equipment needs. These unplanned additional investments, which include training for faculty to teach in these new environments, ensuring broadband capability and accessibility, supporting simulation and telehealth resources, providing personal protective equipment (PPE) for students and faculty alike, and upgrading and purchasing new equipment, are essential to ensuring that nursing students continue their educational coursework.
- **Support future nurse scientists and establish nurse-led partnerships.** The FAAN Act provides resources to support schools of nursing as they help prepare future nurse scientists and researchers who are essential innovators that aim to improve patient outcomes and impact the future of health care. The FAAN Act also supports the establishment of nurse-led partnerships to build upon the framework for future innovation and discoveries.

During these unprecedented times, the nursing workforce, schools of nursing, faculty, and students are answering the call. As the Committee develops workforce legislation, we strongly urge the inclusion of the FAAN Act (S. 246/H.R.851) in any final package. Thank you for your consideration of AACN's feedback and for your strong commitment to address our nation's healthcare needs. We look forward to our continued collaboration during this unprecedented time.

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-nurse-practitioners.htm>

³ American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2020). AACN Factsheet-Nursing Shortage. Retrieved from: AACN Fact Sheet - Nursing Shortage (aacnnursing.org)

Should you have any questions, please contact Rachel Stevenson, AACN's Director of Government Affairs, at rstevenson@aacnnursing.org, or 202-463-6930 ext. 271.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deborah E Trautman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Deborah" on the first line and "E Trautman" on the second line.

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