

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
H-232, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-221, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
H-204, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-230, US Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, Leader McConnell, and Leader McCarthy,

As the Administration and Congress work to rebuild our economy and invest in our future public health and higher education infrastructure, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) recognizes the essential role academic nursing plays in preparing current and future providers, supporting nurse scientists and researchers, and improving the health of the nation. AACN represents nearly 840 member schools of nursing at private and public universities. Our institutions educate more than 580,000 baccalaureate, graduate, and post-graduate students, and employ more than 52,000 faculty members who serve as scientists, educators, and practitioners.¹ While Congress develops and considers infrastructure legislation, AACN strongly urges the inclusion of the following priorities in any package:

Support Nursing Education Infrastructure: Pass the Future Advancement of Academic Nursing (FAAN) Act (S.246/H.R.851)

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), the FAAN Act would ensure 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, the demand for nurses was expected to rise. 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

¹ American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2020). The 2021-2022 Federal Policy Agenda. Retrieved from: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/Portals/42/Policy/PDF/FPA-2021-2022.pdf>

221,900 nurses.² Additionally, demand for certain Advanced Practice Registered Nurses is expected to grow by 45%.³ The FAAN Act would support the enrollment and retention of a diverse student population, thereby ensuring that all nurses have an equal chance to get ahead and are available to meet the nation's healthcare needs in the future.

- **Hire and retain a diverse faculty to educate the nursing workforce.** In the latest National Advisory Council on Nurse Education and Practice (NACNEP) report, it is estimated that “almost one in three nurse faculty members active in 2015 will be set to retire in 2025.”⁴ To ensure enrollment translates to graduations, investment in hiring and retaining faculty is imperative. Further, minority faculty only represent 17.3% of all faculty positions in schools of nursing.⁵ As the nation works to eliminate inequities in our healthcare system, a key factor to increasing diversity and cultural competency of our healthcare workforce is cemented in having diverse faculty members.
- **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.⁶ For many, this is exacerbated by the current public health emergency. The FAAN Act helps address the crucial 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.** 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 additional unplanned 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 are able to continue their education without disruption or delay.
- **Support future nurse scientists and establish nurse-led partnerships.** The FAAN Act builds upon the collaborative nature of nursing by promoting interdisciplinary efforts and nurse-led partnerships. The FAAN Act also 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 positively impact the future of health care.

² U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2020). Occupational Outlook Handbook- Registered Nurses. Retrieved from: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/registered-nurses.htm>

³ 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>

⁴ The National Advisory Council on Nurse Education and Practice (2020). Preparing Nurse Faculty and Addressing the Shortage of Nurse Faculty and Clinical Preceptors- 17th Report to the Secretary of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Congress. Page 10. Retrieved from: <https://www.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/hrsa/advisory-committees/nursing/reports/nacnep-17report-2021.pdf>

⁵ Journal of Nursing Education. (2020). Influence of Climate and Culture on Minority Faculty Retention. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/36qrwiC>

⁶ American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2020). AACN Factsheet-Nursing Shortage. Retrieved from: <https://www.aacnnursing.org/News-Information/Fact-Sheets/Nursing-Shortage>

Support Mental Health Programs for Nursing Students and Workforce

During these unprecedented times, mental health challenges have come to light. As highlighted in a recent survey published in *Nurse Educator*, nearly a quarter of graduate nursing students reported elevated levels of stress, anxiety, and depression over the past year.⁷ This statistic is becoming all too familiar as another study of college students found that “39 percent have symptoms of major depression, 66 percent are battling loneliness, and 13 percent have seriously considered suicide.”⁸ We appreciate additional investments in the American Rescue Plan Act to support mental health for patients, students, and practitioners; however, we recognize more must be done. As policies designed to increase access to mental health treatment are considered in future infrastructure packages, we strongly encourage you to provide support for our nation’s caretakers by explicitly including nursing students, faculty, and nurses.

Support Higher Education and Workforce Development

Affordable higher education is not only critical for the success of the student, their family, and the community, but also for the economy and innovation. Sustaining and preserving student loan programs, such as the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program, Pell Grants, Perkins Loan Program, and the Graduate PLUS Loan help ensure accessibility for all students who wish to be a part of the future nursing workforce. In addition, students, including AACN’s nursing students, are financing their degrees with federal and private loans and then facing debt upon graduation. We urge Congress to include the *Student Loan Forgiveness for Frontline Health Workers Act (H.R. 2418)* in expanding access to education components of infrastructure legislation. This legislation would help alleviate the burden of student loan debt for our frontline healthcare workers, including nurses, so they can fully focus on patient care without worrying about financial hardship.

Support Transformative Research and Data Collection

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 our rapid response to COVID-19. From addressing ongoing healthcare disparities and working to cure cancer, to developing countless other groundbreaking discoveries, the work at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and by our nurse researchers and scientists at the National Institute of Nursing Research (NINR) is fundamental. Continued and increased investments in our research infrastructure, such as through the *Research Investment to Spark the Economy (RISE) Act of 2021 (S.289/ H.R.869)*, are necessary to ensure we remain a global leader in cutting-edge innovations. In addition, data collection and data sharing are especially crucial as we utilize today’s technology to find tomorrow’s cures. AACN recognizes the importance of data collection and is a proud partner of NIH’s *All of Us* Research Program to help create the most diverse health research database in history.

AACN, our member schools, faculty, and students are committed to building a public health and higher education infrastructure that is sustainable, innovative, and inclusive. We commend the Biden Administration and Congress for your ongoing efforts and encourage you to include the above priorities, which will positively impact nursing education, practice, and patient care, in any infrastructure package. We look forward to working with you on these vital issues. Should you have

⁷ Nurse Educator (2021). A Survey of Mental Health in Graduate Nursing Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Retrieved from: <https://journals.lww.com/nurseeducatoronline/pages/articleviewer.aspx?year=9000&issue=00000&article=99192&type=Abstract>

⁸ NBC News (2021). College Students Struggle with Mental Health Amid the Pandemic. Retrieved from: <https://www.nbcnews.com/nightly-news/video/college-students-struggle-with-mental-health-amid-the-pandemic-110427717528>

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

Sincerely,



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



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

CC:

House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer
House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn
House Minority Whip Steve Scalise
Senate Majority Whip Richard Durbin
Senate Minority Whip John Thune
Chairwoman Patty Murray, Senate HELP Committee
Ranking Member Richard Burr, Senate HELP Committee
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Chairman Patrick Leahy, Senate Appropriations Committee
Vice Chairman Richard Shelby, Senate Appropriations Committee
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Ranking Member Tom Cole, House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies