



April 26, 2019

Senator Lamar Alexander  
Chairman  
Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor & Pensions  
United States Senate  
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Patty Murray  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor & Pensions  
United States Senate  
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Johnny Isakson  
Chairman  
Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor & Pensions  
Subcommittee on Employment  
and Workplace Safety  
United States Senate  
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Tammy Baldwin  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Health, Education,  
Labor & Pensions  
Subcommittee on Employment  
and Workplace Safety  
United States Senate  
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander, Ranking Member Murray, Chairman Isakson, and Ranking Member Baldwin:

As the national voice of academic nursing, representing 825 member schools of nursing at public and private universities, the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) is encouraged that the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions has begun efforts to reauthorize the Higher Education Act (HEA). With more than 543,000 baccalaureate, graduate, and post-graduate nursing students and more than 45,000 faculty counted as members, AACN is uniquely aware of the impact higher education has on the health care of America and the development of a robust nursing workforce pipeline.

Nursing education lies at the nexus of higher education and healthcare policy and must be sustainable, inclusive, and innovative as we prepare highly-educated nurses to meet patient needs in all corners of the country. The need for nurses is expected to increase into the next decade. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Registered Nurse (RN) employment is expected to grow 15% by year 2026<sup>1</sup>, and the number of Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs, including nurse practitioners, certified registered nurse anesthetists, clinical nurse specialists, and certified nurse midwives) is expected to grow 31%.<sup>2</sup> Both RN and APRN projected growth is well above the 7% increase expected for all occupations.<sup>3</sup> HEA reauthorization will have a significant impact on our ability to keep up with this demand and support the nurses of today and in the future.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2016). Occupational Outlook Handbook- Registered Nurses. Retrieved from: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/registered-nurses.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2016). 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>.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017). Employment Projections – 2016-26. Retrieved from: <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/ecopro.pdf>

**THE VOICE OF ACADEMIC NURSING**

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HEA reauthorization can support the growing need for nurses by sustaining and preserving federal student loan programs and repayment options, such as the Pell Grant program, the Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant Program, the Direct Loan Program, the Perkins Loan Program, the Grad PLUS Loan, and the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) Program. AACN found in a recent student survey, that half of all respondents reported that the ability to repay their loans was their greatest concern.<sup>4</sup> These federal loan programs are vital to ensuring that students can afford their education while also providing additional opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds to become health professionals.

The PSLF program is a prime example of how existing loan repayment options are critical for the success of the student and their family and the health of the community. With more than 7,000 primary Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs) across the country, an additional 14,900 practitioners are needed to meet the current demand.<sup>5</sup> The PSLF program is essential to this mission and is indispensable to the thousands of future nurses that intend to work in these underserved areas. Nearly 60% of graduate nursing students indicate that they intend to utilize the PSLF program.<sup>6</sup>

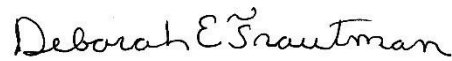
In addition to sustaining these programs, we encourage the Committee to include all nursing students, particularly master's and doctoral students, when considering aggregate borrowing limits. Currently, there are more than 168,000 graduate students within AACN's membership.<sup>7</sup> These students are tomorrow's APRNs, faculty, researchers, and leaders. Given the variety of advanced degrees that nurses attain, it is essential that policies looking to change borrowing practices take into account the potential impact on graduate nursing students, as well as undergraduate students who will one day enroll in a graduate program.

AACN recognizes that higher education is critical to the success of the nursing student, their family, the community, the economy, and the health of our nation's patients. As the Committee continues to consider HEA reauthorization, we would welcome the opportunity to have a nursing dean or student share their experiences and expertise with you or your staff. Should you have any questions or need additional resources, please do not hesitate to contact our Director of Government Affairs, Rachel Stevenson, at [rstenenson@aacnursing.org](mailto:rstenenson@aacnursing.org) or (202)-463-6930 ext, 271.

Sincerely,



Ann H. Cary, PhD, MPH, RN, FNAP, FAAN  
AACN Board Chair



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

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<sup>4</sup> American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2017) *The numbers behind the degree: financing graduate nursing education*. Retrieved from: [http://www.aacnursing.org/Portals/42/Policy/PDF/Debt\\_Report.pdf](http://www.aacnursing.org/Portals/42/Policy/PDF/Debt_Report.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation. (2018) Primary Care Health Professional Shortage Areas. Retrieved from: <https://www.kff.org/other/state-indicator/primary-care-health-professional-shortage-areas-hpsas/?currentTimeframe=0&selectedRows=%7B%22wrapups%22:%7B%22united-states%22:%7B%7D%7D%7D&sortModel=%7B%22colId%22:%22Location%22,%22sort%22:%22asc%22%7D>

<sup>6</sup> American Association of Colleges of Nursing. (2017) *The numbers behind the degree: financing graduate nursing education*. Retrieved from: [http://www.aacnursing.org/Portals/42/Policy/PDF/Debt\\_Report.pdf](http://www.aacnursing.org/Portals/42/Policy/PDF/Debt_Report.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> American Association of Colleges of Nursing (2019). 2018-2019 Enrollment and graduations in baccalaureate and graduate programs in nursing. Washington, DC: Author.

CC:

Senator Michael Enzi  
Senator Richard Burr  
Senator Rand Paul  
Senator Susan Collins  
Senator Bill Cassidy  
Senator Pat Roberts  
Senator Lisa Murkowski  
Senator Tim Scott  
Senator Mitt Romney  
Senator Mike Braun  
Senator Bernie Sanders  
Senator Robert Casey Jr.  
Senator Christopher Murphy  
Senator Elizabeth Warren  
Senator Tim Kaine  
Senator Maggie Hassan  
Senator Tina Smith  
Senator Doug Jones  
Senator Jacky Rosen

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