



NAHN urges Members of the United States House of Representatives and Senate to support H.R. 8691, the “Nursing is a Professional Degree Act,” and any corresponding Senate legislation that formally recognizes advanced nursing education as a professional degree pathway under federal law.

The National Association of Hispanic Nurses is committed to advancing the health and well-being of Hispanic communities and to leading, promoting, and advocating for educational, professional, and leadership opportunities for Hispanic nurses. Central to our legislative agenda is improving healthcare outcomes and expanding access to quality care for all communities. Achieving these goals becomes increasingly difficult when significant financial barriers limit nurses’ opportunities to pursue and complete higher education. Ensuring accessible and affordable pathways to advanced nursing degrees is essential to building a diverse, culturally competent healthcare workforce capable of meeting the needs of the communities we proudly serve.

NAHN is deeply concerned by the U.S. Department of Education’s finalized ruling issued on April 30, 2026, which takes effect on July 1, 2026, explicitly excluding nursing from the list of defined “professional degree programs” under H.R. 1, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA), recently signed into law. Specifically, this pertains to Title VIII, Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, Subtitle B—Loan Limits, Section 81001.

Under the current framework, graduate nursing students are limited to federal loan caps of:

- \$20,500 annually
- \$100,000 total aggregate borrowing

In contrast, students enrolled in programs classified as “professional degrees” are eligible for:

- \$50,000 annually
- \$200,000 total aggregate borrowing

Under OBBBA, students enrolled in programs defined as “professional degrees” under 34 CFR 668.2 qualify for expanded borrowing authority. However, the Department’s existing regulatory definition—unchanged at the time of enactment—includes programs such as pharmacy (Pharm.D.), dentistry (D.D.S./D.M.D.), veterinary medicine (D.V.M.), chiropractic (D.C./D.C.M.), law (L.L.B./J.D.), medicine (M.D.), optometry (O.D.), osteopathic medicine (D.O.), podiatry (D.P.M.), and theology (M.Div./M.H.L.). Nursing was notably excluded despite the fact that advanced nursing degrees require graduate-level education, extensive clinical preparation, supervised training hours, national certification, and licensure.

This inconsistency in the Department’s definition of “professional degree programs” effectively excludes or inadequately recognizes advanced nursing degrees such as the Master of Science in Nursing (MSN), Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP), and Doctor of Philosophy in Nursing (PhD). These programs prepare highly skilled clinicians, educators, researchers, and leaders who are essential to the nation’s healthcare infrastructure.

According to the Department of Education’s press release issued on November 24, 2025, the Department stated that the definition of a “professional degree” is “an internal definition used by the Department to distinguish among programs that qualify for higher loan limits, not a value judgment about the importance of programs. It has no bearing on whether a program is professional in nature or not.”

While NAHN appreciates this clarification, the practical consequences of this policy are substantial and disproportionately harmful to nursing students and the healthcare workforce.

The exclusion of nursing from the professional degree classification carries immediate and serious implications for the nation’s healthcare system. According to the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN), approximately 173,114 advanced practice nursing students were enrolled during the 2024–2025 academic year. Without access to appropriate federal loan limits, many future nurse practitioners, nurse anesthetists, nurse midwives, clinical nurse specialists, nurse educators, and nurse scientists may face insurmountable financial barriers that jeopardize their ability to complete their education.

Recognizing nursing as a professional degree is not only an issue of educational equity, but also an investment in the nation’s healthcare workforce and the health of the American people. Advanced practice nurses provide essential primary acute, preventative, and specialty care services across the country, particularly in rural, underserved and historically marginalized communities where provider shortage remain critical.

The public response to this issue demonstrates the magnitude of concern nationwide. More than 15,750 public comments were submitted regarding this matter, over 150 bipartisan Members of Congress signed a letter urging the Department of Education to classify nursing degrees as professional degrees, and more than 245,000 petition signatures were collected in support of this change.

NAHN respectfully urges our U.S. Representatives and Senators to support H.R. 8691 the “Nursing Is A Professional Degree Act.” Advanced practice nurses are indispensable members of the healthcare workforce, and policies governing educational access should reflect the critical role nurses play in improving health outcomes across the United States.

Thank you for your leadership and consideration of this urgent matter.

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