

PONC Urges Congressional Action Following RISE Rule Impacting Nursing Education Access

Washington, DC-May 8, 2026 — The Professional Organizations representing Nurses of Color (PONC) raises urgent concern regarding the [Reimagining and Improving Student Education \(RISE\) rule](#) issued by the U.S. Department of Education, which excludes post-baccalaureate nursing education from designation as a professional degree within federal student loan program.

This policy decision introduces a structural barrier at a critical point in the healthcare workforce pipeline. At a time of sustained nursing shortages and increasing patient complexity, limiting financial access to graduate and doctoral nursing education undermines the nation's ability to meet current and future care demands.

Advanced nursing education is essential to expanding access to care, strengthening clinical leadership, and preparing a diverse nursing workforce capable of addressing persistent gaps in health outcomes. Policies that restrict access to these pathways adversely influence workforce capacity, distribution, and readiness.

For nurses of color, the impact is compounded. Longstanding inequities in educational access and financing already shape participation in advanced degree programs. Additional constraints unnecessarily risk narrowing the pathways for entry into advanced nursing practice, nursing academic teaching positions, research, and clinical leadership roles areas where representation is essential to improving care delivery and advancing health equity.

Nursing's ethical foundation includes a responsibility to advocate for systems that promote access, equity, and the well-being of communities. Policy decisions that limit educational opportunities run counter to these obligations and carry downstream consequences for patients, families, and communities.

Congressional Action Requested

The Professional Organizations representing Nurses of Color (PONC) calls on Congress to take immediate action to:

- Amend the Higher Education Act (20 U.S.C. § 1087e) to explicitly include post-baccalaureate nursing programs—including MSN, DNP, PhD, and post-graduate APRN certificates—within the definition of professional degree programs eligible for Graduate PLUS loan access and appropriate borrowing thresholds.
- Direct the U.S. Department of Education, through statutory or appropriations authority, to revise and align federal loan regulations to ensure equitable treatment of nursing alongside other health professions.
- Expand and protect federal investments in nursing workforce development, including Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development Programs, with targeted strategies to increase access for underrepresented populations.
- Require a formal federal workforce impact assessment for any rulemaking affecting health professions education, ensuring alignment with national workforce needs and health equity priorities.

A healthcare system cannot meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population without a workforce that is both highly prepared and equitably accessible. Ensuring access to advanced nursing education is a matter of workforce stability, health system capacity, and public health safety. The Professional Organizations representing Nurses of Color (PONC) urges swift congressional intervention to address this policy gap and align federal education policy with the realities of healthcare delivery.

This statement reflects the shared commitment of professional organizations representing over one million racially and ethnically diverse nurses across the United States, including:

1. The Academy of Diversity Leaders in Nursing (ADLN)
2. Black Nurse Collaborative, Inc
3. Black Nurses Week®
4. Chi Eta Phi Sorority, Incorporated
5. Deborah Stamps Consulting, LLC
6. Diversity in Nurse Anesthesia Mentorship Program
7. DNPs of Color
8. Thee Monica (McLemore)
9. National Alaska Native American Indian Nurses Association
10. National Association of Hispanic Nurses
11. National Black Nurses Association, Inc
12. Network of Black Male Nurse Leaders
13. Nursing Social Justice Collaborative
14. Philippine Nurses Association of America
15. Society of Latinx Nurses (SOLN)
16. The Society of PMHNPs of Color
17. DL James Consulting
18. The Institute for Health and Social Equity, Inc.



###

About the Professional Organizations representing Nurses of Color (PONC)

The Professional Organizations representing Nurses of Color (PONC) is a collaborative of nursing organizations committed to advancing ethical practice, protecting human dignity, and advocating for just policies that impact nurses and the communities they serve. PONC works across specialties and practice settings to elevate the voices of nurses of color, address systemic inequities, and promote accountability, transparency, and safety within healthcare and society. Through collective advocacy, education, and coordinated action, PONC affirms the ethical obligations of nursing and supports efforts that safeguard both the nursing workforce and the public.