



Massachusetts Nurses, Specialty Associations & State Leaders Join Opposition to U.S. Department of Education’s Proposed Student Loan Caps that Devalue Nursing

The American Nurses Association Massachusetts (ANAMASS) and leading state officials – along with the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care (ANAC), Massachusetts Association of Public Health Nurses (MAPHN), Massachusetts Coalition of Nurse Practitioners (MCNP), Massachusetts School Nurse Organization (MSNO), Massachusetts Nursing Council on Workforce Sustainability (NCWS) and the Organization of Nurse Leaders - New England (ONL-New England) – strongly oppose the U.S. Department of Education’s proposed rule to impose graduate student loan caps that exclude nursing from the list of recognized “professional” degrees. This omission threatens to undermine the nursing workforce pipeline at a time when the nation continues to face critical nurse and advanced practice nurse staffing shortages. We join the [American Nurses Association](#) and other state and national organizations opposing these proposed changes.

Under the proposed rule, graduate students pursuing degrees in medicine, dentistry, law, veterinary medicine, and others would remain eligible for higher federal loan limits due to their classification as “professional degrees.” However, nursing — despite its rigorous clinical training, licensure requirements, and essential role in public health — is not included in this category.

ANAMASS President Patricia Crispi, PhD, RN, NPD-BC, NE-BC expresses her concerns that “omitting nurses from the highest levels of professionalism devalues nurses and undermines the ability to grow and develop our nursing workforce of the future.”

To fully understand the consequences of this regulatory change, it is essential to recognize the extent to which Massachusetts—and the nation—relies on graduate-prepared nurses. Every component of the health care system, from community clinics to academic medical centers, depends on advanced nursing roles to deliver primary care, support care coordination, address behavioral health needs, and serve patients in high-acuity settings. Restricting access to necessary federal loans would create immediate barriers for registered nurses seeking to advance their education, especially for those from economically and socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

Representative Marjorie Decker, House Chair of the Joint Committee on Public Health, expressed strong concern about the decision, stating that it “is an insult to the rigorous

education and training nurses receive and demonstrates a continued pattern of disregard toward professions traditionally held by women, including nursing, social work, and physical therapy.”

Graduate and doctoral nursing programs—including Nurse Practitioners, Clinical Nurse Specialists, Nurse Anesthetists, and Nurse Midwives—require extensive academic and clinical preparation. These advanced roles are indispensable in filling provider shortages, reducing wait times, and ensuring timely access to preventative and lifesaving care. In Massachusetts, where 40% of communities report difficulty accessing primary care, graduate-prepared nurses represent one of the most realistic, scalable solutions to closing current care gaps.

Senator Cindy F. Friedman (D-Arlington), Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing, emphasizes these concerns: “Nursing is a critical part of the nation’s health infrastructure, and its graduate degrees should be recognized without exception. The current exclusion of nursing and other healthcare professions would impose unnecessary and harmful barriers to care, diminish the primary care workforce, and hinder the Commonwealth’s initiatives to strengthen access to care and promote population health. Massachusetts cannot afford to allow this exclusion to stand — with our health care system already under immense strain, especially our primary care system, any further constraints on the nursing workforce will jeopardize timely, quality care for communities across the Commonwealth.”

The exclusion also threatens progress on long-term workforce initiatives, including efforts to expand clinical training sites, diversify the nursing workforce, and grow the number of nursing faculty at both public and private institutions. Without adequate financing options, nurses pursuing graduate degrees may be forced to delay or abandon their studies, exacerbating shortages and limiting statewide system capacity.

Senator William J. Driscoll Jr., Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Public Health, warns: “The recently proposed exclusion of graduate-level nursing from a professional degree qualification is harmful, disrespectful, and counterproductive to the overall care and service that nurses provide their patients. Limiting their access to federal loan programs creates personal hardship on those pursuing a career in nursing and will have downstream negative impacts on the quality of care provided across our healthcare industry. We need nurses, and in return they need our full support. Safeguarding this profession is a must and begins with affirming the respect and dignity it so deserves.”

Jay Prosser, DNP, RN, CCRN-K, NE-BC Executive Director of the MA Nursing Council on Workforce Sustainability (NCWS) adds: “Nurses are the backbone of the U.S. healthcare system and play a decisive role in patient outcomes. Failing to recognize graduate-prepared nursing roles as professional careers produces significant direct and indirect consequences for the workforce. Directly, it restricts our capacity to educate the nurse practitioners who deliver essential primary care to vulnerable populations and the

psychiatric mental health nurse practitioners needed to address escalating behavioral health needs. It also undermines efforts to expand the number of graduate-prepared nursing faculty required to ensure a sustainable future workforce. Indirectly, this decision weakens a broad range of workforce initiatives designed to maintain an adequate and well-prepared nursing pipeline for the Commonwealth.”

Such consequences extend beyond hospitals and clinics. Public health departments, school health services, long-term care facilities, and behavioral health settings all rely on graduate-prepared nurses whose roles require advanced education. Removing federal financial support undermines the readiness of the entire workforce and directly affects patient outcomes across all communities.

Tiffany Benoit, MPH, BSN, RN, CPH/CHO, President MAPHN states: “Removing the professional designation from nursing degrees will ultimately compromise the quality of healthcare and diminish the recognized standard of care provided by the nursing profession. Such a change, coupled with reductions in federal financial support for programs reclassified as non-professional, will create significant barriers to enrollment and program completion. These barriers will exacerbate existing workforce shortages and further limit access to high-quality, community-based care.

Kelly Haeckel, MSN, RN, NEA-BC, President of ONL–New England, further stresses: “Nursing is a profession requiring intensive academic preparation and specialized disciplinary knowledge. Nurses practice in all settings where healthcare services are delivered, and professional nursing practice is critical to the health of millions of Americans. Any action that would limit access to funds for nurses to pursue advanced degrees is short-sighted and undermines efforts to build a strong and robust nursing workforce.”

Justin Alves, RN, FNP-BC, ACRN, AACRN, CARN, CNE, President of the Boston Chapter of the Association of Nurses in Aids Care (ANAC) also expresses deep concern “This will directly affect the nursing pipeline and the future of the healthcare workforce to care for those living with and at risk for HIV. The decision of the administration to try and end the HIV epidemic in their first term to now trying to end financial assistance for the largest healthcare provider workforce in HIV care is both confusing and distressing.”

Collective Call to Action

ANAMASS, ANAC, MAPHN, MCNP, MSNO, NCWS, and ONL-New England encourage their members, stakeholders, and the public to:

- 1. Learn more about the issue,**
- 2. Sign a national petition,**
- 3. Share their story, and**
- 4. When the time comes, submit comments to the U.S. Department of**

Education advocating for the inclusion of nursing in the final rule.

Together, we can ensure that the Commonwealth's collective voice is heard—and that nursing receives the recognition and respect it deserves as a profession essential to every patient, every community, and the future of our healthcare system.

Thank you!

Sincerely,



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ABOUT THE AMERICAN NURSES ASSOCIATION MASSACHUSETTS

ANAMASS is the state affiliate of the American Nurses Association, representing registered nurses across all practice settings. ANAMASS advances the nursing profession by promoting high standards of practice, supporting nurse well-being, fostering safe and ethical work environments, and advocating on health care issues that impact nurses and the public. Reflective of the profession's depth and diversity, our membership encompasses a broad array of roles and practice environments, from direct care nurses to advanced practice registered nurses serving across acute, long-term, and other essential care environments.

The Association of Nurses in AIDS Care (ANAC) is the leading nursing organization responding to HIV/AIDS. Since its founding in 1987, ANAC has been meeting the needs of nurses and other healthcare professionals in HIV/AIDS care, research, prevention and policy.

Massachusetts Association of Public Health Nurses (MAPHN). MAPHN is the state organization for public health nurses and seeks to strengthen the leadership role of the public health nurses within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Massachusetts Coalition of Nurse Practitioners (MCNP). Founded in 1992, the MCNP is a non-profit professional membership organization for Nurse Practitioners in Massachusetts that provides state-based representation and support for NP practice and regulatory issues regardless of specialty or organizational affiliation.

Massachusetts School Nurse Organization (MSNO) is the Massachusetts Affiliate to the National Association of School Nurses (NASN). MSNO promotes and advances quality school health services throughout the Commonwealth and promote the rights, interests and professional growth of its members.

Massachusetts Nursing Council on Workforce Sustainability (NCWS). The NCWS unites leaders across education, workforce development, government, and healthcare to strengthen the nursing pipeline. We advance evidence-based policy, expand educational and clinical capacity, support pathways into nursing, improve recruitment and retention, and coordinate statewide efforts—including simulation and apprenticeship initiatives—to sustain Massachusetts' nursing workforce.

Organization of Nurse Leaders - New England (ONL-New England)

ONL New England is a professional membership organization for current and emerging nurse leaders focusing on nurse leader professional development and health policy.

