



NLN Active on Capitol Hill

On June 18, in conjunction with the Health Professions and Nursing Education Coalition (NPNEC), the NLN sent the chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies – Ralph Regula (R-OH) – a letter urging the restoration of funding to the Title VII health professions programs to at least the FY 2003 level of \$308 million and an increase for the Title VIII nursing programs in FY 2005. President Bush's proposed FY 2005 budget eliminates most of the funding for the Title VII programs by providing just \$11 million – a 96 percent cut below the current year. These are the only federal programs designed to train providers in interdisciplinary settings to meet the needs of special and underserved populations, as well as increase minority representation in the health care workforce.

Various studies have found that the graduates of these programs are up to 10 times more likely to practice in medically underserved areas than graduates of non-funded programs. At times, they serve as the only sources of health care in many disadvantaged communities.

Earlier this month the NLN, as part of the Federation of Associations of Schools of the Health Professions (FASHP), submitted a list of priorities for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA) to Senators Judd Gregg (R-NH) and Edward Kennedy (D-MA), chairman and ranking member, respectively, of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee. Among these priorities are:

- Extending appropriate deferment options to nursing, pharmacy, and other health professions students engaged in advanced training programs; and
Including all educational loans in the calculation for determining eligibility for the economic hardship deferment.

The latest buzz on Capitol Hill is that it is extremely unlikely that the HEA reauthorization will pass in this congressional session. There just isn't enough time left before Congress adjourns for the general election campaigning.

For a copy of either letter, contact Kathi Ream at nlingov@aol.com

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Task Force Issues Recommendations to Prevent Nursing Crisis in North Carolina

A new report by a North Carolina nursing workforce task force includes 47 recommendations designed to prevent a future nursing workforce crisis in the state. Without action, the state forecasts a shortage of anywhere from 9,000 nurses in 2015 to almost 18,000 by 2020. The North Carolina Institute of Medicine created the task force in 2002 in partnership with the North Carolina Hospital Association (NCHA) and nursing and educational organizations. The task force met for 14 months, focusing on four areas of greatest need: [nursing faculty recruitment and retention](#); nursing education programs; transitions from school to work; and the nursing work environment.

Priority recommendations include a faculty fellows program, which is currently in progress. NCHA recently worked with the regional Labor Department office to help obtain a \$1.5 million grant that will provide fellowships this fall to help 21 nurses with bachelor's degrees obtain master's degrees in nursing. In exchange for the fellowships, the nurses will commit to teaching at the community college level after graduation.

A copy of the report can be viewed at www.nciom.org/projects/nursingworkforce/nursingreport.html.

National Nurse Database Bill Introduced

As a direct result of the Charles Cullen case (self-professed serial killer and RN), Senators Jon Corzine (D-NJ) and Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ) have introduced S.2341, the Safe Health Care Reporting Act. If passed, hospitals and other health care facilities would be required to report to state professional licensing boards and the National Practitioner Databank (NPDB) when any adverse action is taken against a health care professional. The facilities also must report violations of federal or state laws governing professional standards – infractions such as suspected drug diversion, falsification of documents, or repeat medication errors.

In addition, S.2341 requires health care facilities to obtain information from the federal data bank on prospective employees before hiring them. Failure to do so could result in penalties of up to \$50,000 per violation. In addition, health care facilities would have to comply in order to participate in the Medicare program.

At a press conference in New Jersey, Senator Corzine stated, "Charles Cullen's case is [one] of complete and utter failure of the health care system. The current reference system is broken – hospitals fail to provide complete references out of fear of liability. Our legislation will ensure that adverse employment histories, disciplinary and licensing actions, and criminal history are readily available to health care employers through a national databank."

The "current reference system" refers to the NPDB, established in 1986 to track licensing, disciplinary, and medical malpractice actions taken against physicians. The databank does not, however, carry critical information on other licensed health care professionals, such as nurses.

In 1987, the NPDB was expanded and the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) established to report licensing and disciplinary actions taken against health care practitioners other than doctors. This agency, however, failed to implement those provisions. The new legislation would require HRSA to do so. S.2341 also lends protection to whistle-blowers to help nurses feel free to say when they think there is a problem.

New York Considers Mandatory BSN Proposal

The New York State Board of Registered Nursing has drafted a proposal requiring all associate degree nurses to obtain a bachelor's degree in order to continue working in their profession. The proposal is modeled after the New York state licensing requirement for teachers who are certified to teach with a bachelor's degree, but then must obtain their master's degree within a certain time frame in order to keep their certification. If implemented, this certification change would affect only future graduates and not nurses already working. But critics

argue that mandating a baccalaureate degree will only worsen the current nursing shortage. The proposal will be sent to the Board of Regents for consideration in late fall or early winter.

If nurses do not fulfill the BSN requirement, it is unclear what the consequences would be. Thus far, North Dakota is the only state to attempt mandating the baccalaureate degree as the requirement for entry into nursing practice; it dropped the requirement last year.



For All Your 2004 Election Information, Go to the NLN's Public Policy Action Center

NLN's Public Policy Action Center contains a comprehensive resource specifically designed to meet all your Election 2004 needs. From detailed candidate bios to voter registration services, from information about specific ballot initiatives to help in locating polling sites – all this can be found on the Action Center located at www.nln.org.

The features include:

- ZIP code and address-to-district matching for a list of presidential, congressional, statewide, and state legislature candidates;
- Candidate biographical and contact information;
- Candidate position statements;
- Links to candidate meetups;
- Statewide ballot initiative information;
- Voter guide information including key dates and deadlines, ID needed at the polls, and links to voting machine descriptions and polling locations; and
- Voter registration forms.

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