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

(November 23, 2025 – Newark, DE) – The Delaware Nurses Association (DNA) and leading state officials – along with the Delaware Coalition of Nurse Practitioners, Delaware Association of Nurse Anesthetists, Delaware Emergency Nurses Association, Delaware School Nurses Association, Black Nurses Rock Delaware Chapter, Inc., and Delaware Organization for Nursing Leadership – strongly opposes 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](https://www.aanurses.org/) 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.

"This proposal is a direct threat to the future of our profession," said Dr. Kathleen W. Neal, PhD, RN, President of the Delaware Nurses Association. "By excluding nurses from the professional degree designation, the Department of Education is sending a harmful message that undermines the value of advanced nursing education and the critical role nurses play in our healthcare system."

Graduate and doctoral nursing programs, including those for Nurse Practitioners, Clinical Nurse Specialists, Nurse Anesthetists, and Nurse Midwives, require extensive academic and clinical preparation. These programs are essential to expanding access to care, addressing healthcare disparities, and meeting the growing demand for primary and specialized health services.

The DNA calls on the U.S. Department of Education to revise the proposed rule to include nursing among the professional degrees eligible for higher federal loan limits. Failure to do so will disproportionately impact aspiring nurses from underrepresented and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, further exacerbating workforce shortages and health inequities.

"Amid crisis level costs and severe workforce shortages, nurses remain the essential pillars of modern care, a fact the pandemic made unmistakably clear," said Delaware Governor Matthew Meyer. "The federal decision to stop recognizing these healthcare heroes as professionals will only make it harder to expand access, lower costs, and grow a strong workforce, leaving aspiring nurses with even greater obstacles to advancing their careers."

“Delaware’s nurses are the backbone of our health care system, and their advanced education is essential to delivering safe, high-quality care,” said Speaker of the Delaware House of Representatives, Representative Melissa Minor-Brown, MSN, RN. “The U.S. Department of Education’s proposed decision not to recognize advanced nursing degrees as professional degrees is not only misaligned with the realities of modern health care, but it also diminishes the expertise and leadership that advanced practice nurses bring to our communities every day. We must continue to uplift and advocate for the nursing profession, not move backwards.”

“We urge policymakers to recognize that nurses are not only the backbone of our healthcare system — they are leaders, innovators, and essential providers,” said Mr. Christopher E. Otto, MSN, RN, CCRN, Executive Director of DNA. “We stand united with our state and national partners in demanding equitable access to graduate education financing for all nurses.”

“It is essential that our profession unite in opposition to this proposed regulation by openly communicating with the U.S. Department of Education and advocating for the recognition of nurses’ substantial contributions, thereby supporting our ongoing progress through proper classification and federal loan assistance,” said Dr. Nishelle Harris-Hines, DNP, RN, Vice President & Founder of Black Nurses Rock Delaware Chapter, Inc. “Recognizing nursing as a professional degree will not only broaden educational opportunities for future healthcare leaders but also bolster the overall strength of our healthcare system.”

“These proposed federal changes threaten to undermine significant efforts to solve the decades long nursing shortage in the United States,” said Dr. Susan Apold, PhD, APRN, ANP-BC, FAAN, FAANP. “The public has identified nursing as the most trusted profession across the nation for over two decades. Devaluing our education, training, licensure, and certification/s does nothing to advance health and trust in the U.S. healthcare system. Nurses and advanced practice nurses provide lifesaving care every day and ought to be valued in all levels of policy as such.”

The DNA encourages its 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.

ABOUT THE DELAWARE NURSES ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1911, DNA is the premier leading professional association bringing together and advancing the profession of nursing for over 100 years, creating healthier communities for all Delawareans. We are the only professional association in Delaware representing all Licensed Practical Nurses, Registered Nurses, and Advanced Practice Registered Nurses. We continue to advance health through the art and science of nursing supported by diverse members, advocacy, influence, professional development, generation of new knowledge, communication, service, and history.

ABOUT THE DELAWARE COALITION OF NURSE PRACTITIONERS

Founded in 2010, DCNP is the professional association for Delaware’s 2,500+ Certified Nurse Practitioners. The mission of DCNP is to promote high standards of health care delivery through the empowerment of Nurse Practitioners and the profession throughout Delaware.

ABOUT THE DELAWARE ASSOCIATION OF NURSE ANESTHETISTS

Founded in 1953, DANA is the professional association for Delaware's hundreds of Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists. DANA strives to assure the highest standards of anesthesia care for patients while promoting the professional well-being and interests of its members.

ABOUT THE DELAWARE EMERGENCY NURSES ASSOCIATION

DENA is the state affiliate of the Emergency Nurses Association and leading convener of the state's emergency practice nurses. DENA provides emergency nurses with community, professional development, advocacy, and more.

ABOUT THE DELAWARE SCHOOL NURSES ASSOCIATION

Founded in 1968, DSNA is a united affiliate organization of the National Association of School Nurses, dedicated to promoting the practice of professional school nursing. DSNA's mission is to empower school nurses through advocacy, community, and leadership.

ABOUT THE BLACK NURSES ROCK DELAWARE CHAPTER, INC.

Founded in 2016, BNRDE's goal within the State of Delaware is to act as a catalyst for change by providing healthcare education, screening, and services to promote the health and growth of its citizens on a volunteer basis to help slow the epidemic of diabetes, heart disease/stroke, HIV/AIDS, prostate and breast cancers, and maternal health through education. BNRDE is a leader in community outreach and engagement, nurse development and leadership, and scholarship.

ABOUT THE DELAWARE ORGANIZATION FOR NURSING LEADERSHIP

DONL is the leading association for Delaware's emerging and current nursing leaders. DONL advances nursing leadership through professional development, advocacy, scholarship, mentorship, and more. DONL is the state chapter of the American Organization for Nursing Leadership.

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